

Femme Fatales

February 25

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ROBIN TUNNEY
ANGELA BASSETT
"SUPERNOVA"
CAMERON DIAZ

THE BLAIR
WITCH PROJECT

THE BARE
WENCH PROJECT

THE EROTIC
WITCH PROJECT

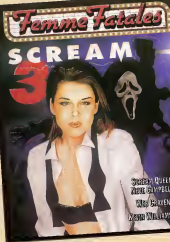
THE BARE
TITS PROJECT

BLAIR WITCH
HEATHER DONAHUE

Volume 6
Number 12



1999 ANNUAL: FEMMES OF THE YEAR



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Femme Fatales

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The Femmes of 1999 Annual

FEBRUARY 25, 2000

Happy New Year. Have I consumed too much take or is this issue pretty much ashed into THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT? Nearly half a year after the film debuted, the media is still enraptured with the film's enigmatic, anti-Hollywood tract. It's hardly useful corporate America everything from prime time series to automobile accessories have been picked with some sort of homage to the film's confessional scene. My God, even the kiddies aren't immune to its impact: a recurrent gag on the Cartoon Network unites the Scooby-Doo ensemble for more BLAIR buffoonery. And now the film's overseas revenue has opened European lanes: Roberto D'Onofrio just called with info on the Italian BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (never mind that THE BLAIR WITCH was shot months ago, in L.A.).

Unfortunately, all of this BLAIR burlesque dumb-downs the pivotal role of Heather: sometimes, she's spit-up & disseminated into multiple bamboos, most of whom somehow surrender to latent sapphic impulses. Couldn't someone find humor in the film's sexual politics? It's about a matriarch (Heather) competing with a Boy's Club, and the odds are 2:1 against her. But one of the beauties of BLAIR WITCH is that it deflates any pretension about developing into a battle of the sexes (confronted to contentiously feminist bromides in Hollywood product). Heather Donahue reveals in her page 16 interview that some viewers have translated the film's ambiguous fade-out score into a "hit versus hit" conspiracy (personally, I don't buy it but it's poignant that the actors impressed a comradely relationship between themselves: all too human, they completely blow-off the Hollywood compromise of banding).

Some feedback to this issue's front cover photo is intriguing: photographed by Denise Duff, Ms. Donahue—wears the gems, grime & unflattering clothes—is unrecognizable to the film's most dedicated addicts. Hey, she's a babe!

Finally, I'd like to thank Forum PP editor Laura Schiff (L.A.)—talk about a babe!—for compiling this issue's "Femmes of '99" wrap-up. Jump to page 5

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LORIDAWN MESSURI

WHILE INCREASING HER PRIME TIME VISIBILITY, SHE STARRED IN A PROVOCATIVE HORROR FILM.

BY MITCH PERSONS

I had heard from producer/director Mike Trisiano that LoriDawn Messuri—who played the central femme of his apocalyptic shoot-'em-up *WASTELAND JUSTICE*, was a shy, small-town type of gal, the sort of woman who conservatively constrains her conversation to sound bites and blushes at the slightest hint of male/female intimacy. Uh-huh.

I subsequently arranged to meet Messuri at the El Coyote Restaurant on Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles (I'll be sure to plug this cartoon again on page 38) I was a few minutes early, so I sat down on a bench in front

of the restaurant's patio and ordered some java. A few sips later, Messuri—wearing a tight, low-cut blouse and worn-beneath-the-skin white slacks—came sauntering up, slightly out of breath.

"Sorry I'm late,"—she was actually quite punctual—"but I'm auditioning for a pilot and I had to call my agent. My cell phone died on me, and I just wasted 15 minutes trying to get change for a pay phone that wasn't even working."

I proffered my own cell phone and, as she leaned over to take it, the cinnamon-haired, 5'7" Aphrodite's splendid cleavage partially spilled out of her crop top. The eyes of two men seated behind me, both of whom had been drifting into a margarita daze, were locked firmly on the actress's chest.

"Hey doll, can I see your underwear?" queried one of the moonheads.

Messuri looked up calmly, her tanned facial complexion bereft of blush or even a grimace. "Why bother?" she replied. "I'm not wearing any."

So much for small-town timidity.

"I really am a little on the diffident side," said Messuri after we had been seated. "I just try to not let it show. How I happened to get start-



LoriDawn Messuri, as Lulu, in the "darkly comic" horror/psychological sleeper, *CRUISING PURGATORY*. "She's lying on the fringe of her own demonic rage."

ed in acting is a case in point. I had moved to Los Angeles from San Jose, where I was going to school. I had a pretty good head for business, and had a vague idea of maybe starting up a dress shop. I was visiting a friend of mine, an actress on MELROSE PLACE. I was just sitting there on this little stool, not saying anything, when the director came up to me and asked if I would like to be an extra in one of the scenes.

"I had never done anything like that in my life and, at first, I was dumfounded. But I put on my best smile and said, 'Well, of course I would!' I had a short bit in a crowd scene but the

director must have liked me, because he asked me back several more times. I did enough extra and bit work to eventually I got my SAG card.

"Looking back on that first experience, I tend to think I must have put it out into the ethers that I wanted to be an actress. Why else would a total stranger approach me and offer me a part in a TV show? I am a firm believer in that, in believing so strongly in something that inevitably it will come to you and in almost an effortless way I happen to love horses, but for most of my life I didn't have enough funds to purchase

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Messuri: "I entirely didn't appreciate how this poster related to the film's vision. I do like the surreal graphics."



THE FEMMES OF 1 9 9 9

BY LAURA SCHIFF

Welcome to *Femme Fatales*, 1999 Annual edition, a year-end wrap-up of the year's best news and notables.

● **TriStar Picture's CUBE** is my pick for "Best B-Movie of 1999." Technically, this existential sci-fi sleeper debuted in 1997 at the Toronto Film Festival, Sundance, Berlin, Edinburgh and a few others followed in '98, culminating in the film's brick-and-mortar release in a couple of U.S. arthouses in September '98. Meanwhile, 1999 saw its resurrection on home video, then making it accessible to the teenage masses (sorry for a senescent brain bender) **STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE's** Nicole deBoer, who played the Trill Elnor Dax in the final season, stars in **CUBE** as a beautiful math genius who awakens one day to find she's been mysteriously imprisoned in what is essentially a giant Rubik's Cube rigged with a series of lethal booby-traps. Fellow captives include Nino Vingini (as the risk-first-attempt physician, David Hewlett) as an infuriating snail, Andrew Miller as an idiot scientist, Maurice Dean Wint as a desperate cop and Wayne Robson as a prison escapee. Shot for \$265,000 Canadian on a single set, writer/director Vincenzo Natali (along with co-writers Andre Blythe and Glenn Mazzara) has crafted a smart, disturbing story that sinks all of its budget into a few well-placed special effects shots. **CUBE** walked away with the Jury Prize for Best Film at Mexico's Second Festival of Science Fiction & Fantasy Cinema in 1998. The film brought in \$10.3 million on its French theatrical release in July '99.

When I recently e-chatted with director Natali, he had this to say: "CUBE is my little contribution to the cinema l'antichambre. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see it honored in your magazine. As far as my next project is concerned, I have a script called **SPUCE** which has just been optioned by Robert Lentos (David Cronenberg's producer for **Seraphim Falls**). I will shoot sometime next summer here in Toronto with much of the same key crew and effects people that worked on **CUBE**. It's a horror-romance about the 'Dorrie and Clyde' of genetics. The budget is in the \$10 to \$15 million range. Can't wait to see if **Now that DEEP SPACE NINE** has been deep seed,



ROSWELL, Best New Genre Series: L-R: Majandra Delfino, Shiri Appleby, (seated) Katherine Heigl, Jason Behr, Brendan Fehr, Nick Wechsler, Colin Hanks

Nicole deBoer has returned to her native soil. She'll be a regular on the Canadian TV series **DOOLEY GARDENS**, and co-stars with Charlie Sheen and Emilio Estevez in the TV movie **THE MITCHELL BROTHERS**.

● There were a lot of fun, genre-related TV shows this year. **ANGEL**, the **BUFFY** spin-off, is enjoyable for its dexter, snoot, slightly more intelligent take on the supernatural. **Tia Carrere's RELIC HUNTER** isn't a bad way to kill an hour, either. But my pick for this year's "Best New Genre Series" is **ROSWELL**. There's a reason this series premiere was the WB's second highest debut ever. Smart, suspenseful, sly but not self-referential, **ROSWELL** tells the story of three teen aliens living in the general vicinity of the infamous Area 51. When one of them saves the life of a human girl, he risks blowing his cover. Rife with paranoia and liberal doses of romance, **ROSWELL** is **THE X-FILES** for the Silver Tab set. It doesn't hurt, either, that everyone in this Y-Gen cast is gorgeous. Lead actress Shiri Appleby is as talented as she is beautiful, and my heart goes pitter-patter for the two adorable alien duos played by Jason Behr and Brendan Fehr (does anyone else think this surname

similarity is a bit out-of-the-ordinary?). But my favorite character on the show is Minnie, the cackling sidekick. Played by Majandra Delfino, she's the recipient of my "Best Genre Newcomer" award for 1999. Without a doubt, Delfino is this generation's answer to Molly Ringwald. She gets all the funniest lines and snappy comebacks and she looks adorable in the silver "alien" antennae she wears at the cool cosmo-themed town trip of a diner where she slings grapes. It's sad her upcoming episodes will feature Delfino more prominently in the story lines. And you can bet your ray gun it'll be running to the multiplex to see her in the much-anticipated horror spoof **I KNOW WHAT YOU SCREAMED LAST SUMMER**.

● This year, the "Queen of B-Movies" crown goes to British horror icon Eileen Daly for her work at Palm Entertainment's **RAZOR BLADE SMILE**. The best vampire film to come out of Europe since Henry Koster's 1971 anguished odyssey **DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS**, **RAZOR BLADE SMILE** follows the life of the gorgeous, undead Lilith Silver from Victorian times through the seamy Goth culture today circles she hunts in today. Daly previously seen in **PERVIRELLA**

and **WITCHCRAFT X**, plays a vampire who's hired to assassinate the members of a Mesopotamian cult known as the Illuminati. She's the perfect vamp with her long black hair, cool sense of humor, romantic aura and insatiable sexual appetite. Stylishly written and directed by 36-year-old first-timer Jane West, **RAZOR BLADE SMILE** is campy, hold the cheese. I'm holding my breath to see what Eileen Daly will be up to next.

● My award for this year's "Best Genre Scribe" goes to M. Night Shyamalan, whose creepy ghost story **THE SIXTH SENSE** made boxoffice history when it became the first film ever to rake in over \$50 million for each of five consecutive weeks. As we go to press, **SENSE** tops the sales at \$250 million. It stars Bruce Willis as a child psychologist who comes to the aid of a beleaguered young boy (Haley Joel Osment) who's saddled with the unwanted gift of seeing the dead. Actress Toni Collette (**VELVET GOLDMINE**) does an excellent job as the boy's single mom, a tough cookie who's ready to crumble under the stress of her son's apparent psychosis. Thanks to the unprecedented success of this film, also directed by Shyamalan, horror cinema is now enjoying yet another surge in popularity. Watch for a deluge of death-and-doom flicks in the coming months.

● Another genre film that's

ROSWELL's Majandra Delfino, Best Genre Newcomer, was formerly a regular on **THE TONY DANZA SHOW**



helped to revitalize the horror film as we head into the new millennium: **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT**, the well-deserved recipient of my "Must-See Genre Movie" this year. Produced for a reported initial cost of only \$90,000, this indie film was the star of Sundance. Arizonan paid Haxan Films approximately \$1.5 million for the distribution rights, and **BLAIR WITCH** went on to become the most profitable movie of all time: its current take, \$140 million. Filmmakers Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez taught cult members how to use 16mm and digital video cameras, then set them loose in the wilderness. The resulting result is a subjective, you-are-there mock documentary on the legend of the Blair Witch: a hairy, evocative creature who terrorizes the Maryland forests and makes spooky arts-and-crafts projects out of twigs and rocks. When student filmmaker Heather Donahue, playing herself, loses her way in the woods, myrick quickly enlists among her technical crew (Michael C. Williams and Joshua Leonard as themselves). Things only get worse from there. The actress has taken some heat for being too pushy, too bitchy, too—dare I say it?—true-to-life. But there's no denying that Donahue's raw hysteria strikes a nerve with anyone who's ever been truly scared for his life. Myrick and Sanchez are reportedly working on a **BLAIR WITCH** sequel (or possibly a prequel), which begs the question: can the Haxan team make magic happen twice? Stay tuned.

● The "Best Image Overhaul"

Suitably sappy in **THE HAUNTING**, Catherine Zeta-Jones would be delicious as **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER**.



Jennifer Lien (left) plays Haxan imitator Ophelia—the antihero of Lars Crowl-in Monolith Productions' interactive game, **BLOOD 2: THE CHOSEN** (right).

award for 1999 goes to Universal Studios. Rebounding from last year's slew of boxoffice losers—did anyone see **MEET JOE BLACK?**—Universal unwrapped **THE MUMMY** this year, which went on to become one of the top 50 all-time boxoffice champs. The remake of the studio's 1952 Boris Karloff classic starred Rachel Weisz. Brendan Fraser and countless digital nasties. Hey, I didn't like the movie personally, but it did manage to pull the studio somewhat out of the red. Following this, Universal immediately ransacked their entire collection of classic horror titles, fast-tracking several of them for future remakes. Look for modern updates of **THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN**, **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**, **THE INVISIBLE MAN** and **CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON**, not to mention **THE MUMMY 2**, coming in 2000. But what I really want to know is, when

are we going to see Catherine Zeta-Jones playing the title vamp in a remake of **DRACULA'S DAUGHTER**, horrors? Pretty please?

● Stepping this year's "Best Female Gaming Character" category is **BLOOD 2: THE CHOSEN**'s Ophelia. Cold and calculating, Ophelia is the antihero of **TOMB RAIDER**'s Lara Croft. While Lara is basically a sweet gal doing a tough job, Ophelia is brist, manipulative, and self-loathing. Oh yeah, and did I mention she's an undead practitioner of black magic? **BLOOD 2** takes place in a futuristic world that is bleak and without hope. An ancient, evil organization called The Cabal is on the brink of world domination, suppressing the will of the people through economic and social depression. Led by a ruthless leader named Gideon, The Cabal does the bidding of the Dark God Tchotchotch. Their somewhat reluctant opponents are known as The

Chosen, of which alluring Ophelia is a member. She's got this really bad case of low self-esteem and poor body image, so imagine her in as finding herself trapped in her own flesh for all eternity and unable to die. The gal is ticked off, to say the least. Angry, dark, and vengeful, Ophelia is an anti-heroine for the new millennium.

● Amy Irving walks away with top honors in this year's "Best Genre Comeback" category. Twenty-three years ago—and nine years before becoming the first Mrs. Steven Spielberg—Irving played Sue Snell in **CARRIE**. Given De Palma's prom-from-hell horror flick, **Suey Snell** played the title role, a creepy teen with telekinetic powers. Irving's character is one of the few to survive the fire that results from Carrie's unfettered fury. Flash forward to 1999. Amy Irving reprises her role in **CARRIE 2** and sports



the exact same haircut. She's now the school guidance counselor, natch. So what if she did hard time at the local insane asylum? Hey, it's public education in the '60s, they can't afford it better. When Carrie's half-sister Rachel (played by Emily Bergl) also begins to demonstrate telekinesis, Miss Snell starts flashing back to her own traumatic teen years. With only the best of intentions, she tries to shrink Rachel's head... "ya think that free poker through the brain was some kind of a sign, maybe?" By the way, my "Best Genre Comeback" for a male would hands down have to go to William Shatner. His parody of himself in the wonderful indie flick **FREE ENTERPRISE** is a must-see for any serious trucker (er, trucker... er... er, the hell with it).

● Stepping this "Most Dead Director" category this year is the late great William Castle. The film maker responsible for such kitschy

horror fare as **THE TINGLER** ('86), **MACABRE** ('88), **13 GHOSTS** ('89) and the Joan Crawford starrer **STRAIT-JACKET** ('84), Castle enjoyed something of a revival this year. First, big-time producers Joel Silver (**JOE HUNT**) and Robert Zemeckis (**BACK TO THE FUTURE**) built Dark Castle Entertainment, a production palace of horror to honor the memory of the legendary director. Their first project? A remake of Castle's 1959 Vincent Price classic, **THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL**. Combining white knuckle terror with dark humor, **HOUSE** is about a group of five strangers who've been offered \$1 million to spend the night in a haunted insane asylum. The modernized version stars Famine Janssen (her character's named Evelyn Price, in a nod to you-know-who), Elizabeth Hurley, Bridgette Wilson (I **KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**), and singer Lisa Loeb, as well as **AMERICAN BEAUTY**'s Peter Gallagher and Oscar winner Geoffrey Rush. Not to be outdone, the late director's daughter, Terry Castle, recently announced that she, too, has plans to found a horror studio dedicated to remaking her father's frightening films. No word yet what her first projects going to be. Terrifying trivia: did you know that William Castle was the uncredited producer of **ROSEMARY'S BABY**? That's him in the film making a cameo as the mysterious man near the phone booth.

● My pick for the "Campiest Genre Film" of 1997: **BLOOD DOLLS**, by Full Moon Entertainment. Directed by the always-outrage Charlie Bend, there's something for everyone here: sexy babes in bondage gear, theatrical nudgets, sadistic clowns, a campy villain and lots of cool gadgets that kill. Christopher Logan stars as Virgil Thaw, a psycho billionaire with a shrunken head who employs a trio of killer dolls to off a group of financial cadres who've cheated him out of a fortune. Co-star Debra Meyer is delicious as a calculating dominatrix who's smothered everyone into believing she's the moosey wife of a corporate genius. Also delightful are the Blood Dolls, a quartet of caged female muscians who are made to perform on demand. The band—comprised of Yvette Lenz, Pamela White, Janella Paragdee and Sumender Cheneva (soon Vanessa Taylor)—provides a rockin' soundtrack with trilling titles such as "Kill, Kill, Pussy." I suggest massive bong hits for maximum viewing pleasure. □

Vanessa Taylor, posing for Duane Polanco, is one of a rockin' quartet called **THE BLOOD DOLLS** ("Campiest Genre Film" of '97). Taylor is the star of Sumender's **FEMALISM** franchise.



ROBIN TUNNEY SUPERNOVA

REFLECTIONS OF HORROR PIX (SHE REJECTED "SCREAM"), SCI-FI, INDEPENDENTLY-PRODUCED FILMS AND NUDITY IN OUTER SPACE.

BY DALE KUTZERA

It seems hardly a month goes by these days without the usual routine: a new "it" girl is plucked from a low-rated but demographically lucrative television drama and dropped into a teen-horror flick. Neve Campbell, Brandy, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Katie Holmes—the list goes on.

While this growing cadre of youthful actresses continue to mine the genre, the star of *THE CRAFT*—the film that pioneered the whole trend—has shifted gears. Robin Tunney, who was featured with Campbell and Fursza Balk in the movie—which metamorphosed adolescent angst into sorcery—has eschewed profitable horror commerce in favor of smaller, offbeat films.

"I was offered all those kinds of movies, and I wanted to make a conscious decision to make a break and do something different," said Tunney, who had previously appeared with Renee Zellweger in *EMPIRE RECORDS* and ignited her career with *ENCINO MAN*. "I'm really proud of the work in [*THE CRAFT*] and certainly had a great time making it. But by the time the film came out, it wasn't



"Women generally have shorter careers than men," explains Robin Tunney. "You hit it and—all of a sudden—you are twerking with the room party." Last year, the actress was clocked up as Teller's better half in *END OF DAYS*.

what I felt like doing anymore. They wanted me to come in and meet with Wes [Craven for *SCREAM*], but I didn't go. I didn't have any interest in the story. I felt I had done it. I'm glad Neve [Campbell] got to do it and had success with it. People tend to imagine there is competition, but I don't really feel that way. When you look at somebody doing great work—I mean, the same person whom, when you met him or her, had just been starting out and struggling—it is great to see that it happens for people. When I saw JEREMY MAGUIRE, I was over the moon happy for Renee. I think it's a really exciting time for young actors. Something like this happens every ten years or so, and it is great to look at your peers and be inspired by them and the work they are doing."

Tunney opted for the more challenging but decidedly less commercial character of a woman afflicted with Turret's Syndrome in *NIAGARA, NIAGARA*. The role earned her the 1997 Venice Film Festival's Volpi Cup for Best Actress, the first time an American qualified for the trophy. "It is a different kind of success. To meet people like Jane Campion, and have people like Dustin Hoffman see your



That "Hearing that Angela Bassett was going to do a role was a really big deal for me," explains Tunney. "She's a great, great person." Right: Tunney, Bassett and the *Nightingale* 223 crew examine an alien artifact.



Tunney seizes into the sci-fi mill: "I go to a 'Wet Hot American Summer' movie for different reasons than an art or a sex film. As an actor, I would like to try my arm at all of them."

film and say they admire your work, that is the road I wanted to take. Everybody wants to put you into a category—but to keep on surprising people, including yourself, is more exciting to me than making tons of money or making the same character over and over again."

SUPERNOVA renews Tunney's ties with mainstream Hollywood. Directed by Walter Hill and boasting a cast that has, like Tunney, traversed the boundaries between independent and studio filmmaking, the \$60-million movie is the most lavishly produced credit on the actress' resume. While the story proved intriguing, it was the opportunity to work with seasoned veterans that appealed to her. "I was initially involved before Walter came on," said Tunney, "and hearing Angela [Bazzetti] was going to do a role was really a big deal to me. I think she is one of the

finest actresses. We had some scenes together but mostly we palled around a bit, which was really cool. She's an incredibly real, giving, great person and inspiring to be around."

Tunney is very cognizant that's she's past the advent of a burgeoning career. "Women generally have shorter careers than men," she ex-

plained. "You hit 35 and, all of a sudden, you are teetering with the mom parts. The important thing is doing good work no matter what format it is in, whether it is a \$100 million movie or a \$1 million movie. It's about reading something, sensing an opportunity and also realizing the opportunity is not always going to be there. When

you're starting out, there must be a commitment to doing things for the right reason and creating some sort of an audience foundation. I did two or three little movies before **THE CRAFT** and all of them had great stories and great characters—it's the same reason I'm doing **SUPERNOVA**."

Circumventing competition with the sci-fi genre's surfeit of optical effects, which will be added in post-production, Tunney instead opted to hone her acting technique. "It's a lot more challenging acting in a film where you are reacting to a lot of things that aren't there," said Tunney, "because you're not relying on dialogue, and you're not relying on realism and your own memory. Things have a heightened reality, so as an actor you have to swing for the fences in how you react to things. It could just be a C-stand when you're doing it, and you've got to pretend

Tunney covens with director Walter Hill (who took his name off the film) and Peter Facinelli. "I was involved before Walter came on the film."



that it's going to kill you. I think all the great sci-fi films have had great acting in them, because that is what makes the story plausible beyond the sets and special effects."

Tunney is cast in *SUPERNOVA* as Danika Lund, a paramedic on board the deep space medical vessel Nightingale 329. While the small crew tries to develop a tolerance for their collective boredom, Lund and medical technician Yerry Pensalosa (Lou Diamond Phillips), prepare to start a family. Their blissful union, however, is intruded upon by a distress call from a mining operation deep in the heart of a rogue moon. The Nightingale finds one survivor, Troy Larson (Peter Facinelli), and an alien artifact. Chaos ensues. Pensalosa is burdened with an addiction to the object's rejuvenating powers, and Tunney's character eventually becomes entwined—both emotionally and physically—with the enigmatic Larson.

In one key sequence, Lund and Larson engage in what may be the first weightless sex scene since *MOONRAKER*, where 007 brokered Holly Goodhead's substratosphere. "The only reason I did it was I hadn't seen it before, and thought it could be cool," smiled Tunney. "I have never done a love scene. I've sort of simulated sex in a clothed kind of way, so I thought that it could be really beautiful. And on a movie this size and with the people that were going to see it, I wasn't worried about it being risqué or degrading. It was a big decision, but I've done eight or nine films and have never been naked in them so I think people consider me an actor. I wasn't afraid they would say, 'Oh, there is the girl who takes her clothes off.' You don't want to establish yourself as that. But it is something you have to be ready for psychologically and not get pushed into it."

Noted producer Dan Chuba, "The seduction scene is

"All the great sci-fi films have had great acting in them, because that makes the story plausible beyond the sets and the special effects. It's more challenging.."



T. Tunney tussles with Oscar-winner Robert Forster (JACQUE SPONSON) in the ship's intermedium. If Love Triangle: drawn to Peter Facinelli, survivor of a rogue moon mission, Tunney feels elevated from sailor Lou Diamond Phillips.



not a huge part of the film, but it is a magical part. [Larson] is talking about space and why it is so magnificent to be out there, and he seduces Robin into taking her clothes off. This scene is about seduction. It's not a sex scene. We get to see beautiful people with their clothes off, but it's not hot,

active sex. This is beautiful. Larson is charming and has the [alien] object working for him. We have a fly-by of the ship rocketing past, and you can down and see this glass dome and they are floating inside."

The sequence was technically complex, with both actors shot against a green

screen. Traditional wire suspension could not be utilized as there was no place to hide harnesses on a couple of naked actors. Instead, effects supervisor Tommy Fisher devised a comparatively simple technology: platforms that employed six boots and a bicycle seat to support the actors as well as induce a bobbing illusion of weightlessness.

"The rigs were very strange and humiliating," said Tunney, who points out the nudity will be kept to a PG-13 level of discretion. "We had to be naked to do it and—oh, believe me—it was uncomfortable. The only difference is I was back naked in front of 75 people instead of 75 million people. I think you can show a bit of butt and skin in PG-13. What I'll say about my sex scene is there is nothing sexy about it. It's movie magic. But Peter Facinelli is pretty cute, and I've kissed guys who were a lot worse."

Tunney notes that the entire cast had to check their modesty at the stage door for one ensemble piece: "We also had to travel naked in our DSU tubes, sort of like pods on the ship. You have to travel in them when the ship goes at a rapid speed. We were going on an emergency call and everyone had to strip in front of each other. So I've seen everybody in the cast naked except for Ms. Bassett. If I was remotely uncomfortable, I could turn around and they were all back naked."

Following principle photography on *SUPERNOVA*, Tunney returned to her New York home for a bit of R&R. She had no immediate work plans, other than reading scripts and exploring other options and characters. "I think you have to maintain a balance," said Tunney. "I enjoy all different movies and would enjoy being in all different kinds. I go to a thrill ride movie for different reasons than an art film or a sci-fi film. As an actor, I would like to try my arm at all of them and not get stuck in a rut of any kind."

ANGELA BASSETT SUPERNOVA

THE OSCAR-WINNING ACTRESS, WHO'S NO STRANGER TO SCI-FI, DISCUSSES THE FILM'S DIRECTOR AND A "BLOODY" GOOD ROLE.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Moved to tears by James Earl Ray's performance in a Washington, D.C. production of *Of Man and Men*, high school pupil Angela Bassett vowed to tackle the acting profession. After graduating from Yale College, she enrolled in the Yale School of Drama. Bassett eventually returned home to her city of birth, New York, with a Masters of Fine Arts diploma. She subsequently landed roles in off-Broadway productions, including *Black Girl* and *Colored People* Time.

Appearances on a myriad of television series—*THE COSBY SHOW*, *TOUR OF DUTY*, *SPENCER FOR HIRE*, etc.—sharpened her skills in front of the camera. Bassett made her movie debut in *F/X* (1986), a film about folks outmaneuvered by movie technology, as a TV reporter. She later surfaced in films as variable as *KINDERGARTEN COP*, *CITY OF HOPE* and *BOYZ 'N THE HOOD*, and further out her teeth in *INNOCENT BLOOD*, a sleeper about a bloodsucking French femme, and *VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN*, the latter an Eddie Murphy vehicle (footnote



Oscar-winner Angela Bassett as *SUPERNOVA*'s Dr. Kaela Evans. "The film was a change of pace for me. Usually, my characters are [tagged to] heavy drama."

Bassett bagged a "Best Actress" Oscar for her performance in 1993's *WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?*)

She allied herself with sci-fi via *CRITTERS IV*, the final installment of the "space porcupines" franchise and, directed by Kathryn Bigelow (*NEAR DARK*), Bassett was cast as Lorette "Mace" Mason in *STRANGE DAYS*, which transpires during the closing days of the millennium. Bassett's character is a security expert whose armor-plated limousine transports the rich and famous through an increasingly chaotic landscape. Bassett is adhering to the genre with *SUPERNOVA*, one of the first films to premiere during the dawn of 2050. The space saga is set in the early 22nd century: Nightingale 229, a deep space medical ship, cruises to a comet mining operation that dispatched a distress signal. Chaos ensues. The crew is soon imperiled by an ineffable entity, as well as a giant star that's flaring into a supernova.

"I was attracted by the science fiction nature of the script," said Bassett, who was cast as medical officer Dr. Kaela Evans. "It was an opportunity to do the 'space ad-



Bassett and starlet Robert Pattinson whose head has fused with his space helmet in a hyperspace malfunction. "This was an opportunity to do a 'space adventure'."

venture' kind of work—the physical requirements, the action sequences. It's a change of pace for me. Usually, my characters are involved with a lot of heavy drama. There's drama on board this ship also, but you do have that action coupled with it and I think that makes it different and more exciting. Of course, while I

was reading the script, a lot of science fiction elements that they described made no sense to me, but what made sense to me was the story, the characters, their interaction, their needs, their desires, what they want—the conflict and trying to resolve it, and getting to the happy ending."

An insider has referred to

the film as "ER in outer space," a summation that earns Bassett's seal of approval. "We are an ambulance ship," explains the actress, "so it's our business to save and rescue those who are in distress out here in space. But the only blood that you see is from the guts of my crew mates, as opposed to those we're saving."

She recounted that her most memorable scene was in the medical bay. "I perform an autopsy on one of the characters that you hear about, Lucky Chow 101," said Bassett. "But he's indisposed at the top of the movie. So I had to open him up and take out his liver and his heart. So that was interesting, along with the

Left: Bassett and Paula Tolley making up ("I just think Angela is one of the finest actresses," says Tolley. "We pulled around a bit.") Right: Bassett with (l-r) Wilson Cruz, Tolley and James Spader. "There's an inkling of a relationship between my character & Spader's. But things get messy so it's just put on the back burner."



goo and the medical dialogue. That was very difficult for me so I enjoyed that. I've never played a doctor before."

Bassett didn't research the role by checking into her local hospital. "No, though I could have just gone and had my yearly checkups and watched them," she grinned. "But I pretty much just took the information from the script and tried to make as much sense of the 'medical-speak' as possible—finding exactly what it is I'm saying and what I'm doing."

Nick Vasant (James Spader), recruited to shot the crew on its odyssey, develops a relationship with Kaela. "We've been out here in space for about five years," Bassett said. "James is the copilot to Robert Forster's character, pilot A.J. Marley. Robert's character has a mishap early on, so Nick's in charge. He has a somewhat dubious past in terms of substance abuse. Kaela's secretive about her past relationships. You know it's tight quarters and people get close, often quickly."

"You're out here. You're isolated. There's seven of you. You know, you're a family. He wants to be friendly. She doesn't know how 'friendly' and she keeps him at bay. I think because she's a medical officer and knows his past from his records, what with his drug abuse, it just sparks something in her because she's been involved with someone else who's gone down that path, and it wasn't easy. But they click. They come to respect each other and the professionalism in each other, and they come to need each other, to rely on each other when the situation becomes life and death. They do end up having a relationship, or the beginnings of a relationship, near the end. There's an inkling of one beginning early on, but pretty soon thereafter everything is just blown to the four corners. Things get crazy, so that's put on the back burner."

Bassett compares the

ANGELA BASSETT

"[I] was attracted by the sci-fi nature of the script. [Director] Walter Hill helped me find the right note. It's so out of context for me to be in technical movies that rely on spaceships."



Bassett and Ralph Fiennes in *STRANGE DAYS* (1996), a cult classic that earned Kathryn Bigelow a Saturn Award for Best Director (she previously landed the trophy for *BLAZING DARRYL*). A *San Francisco Chronicle* critic, one of the film's detractors noted that Bassett [3] "gives her role more dignity than it deserves."



spacecraft's restricted quarters to the movie's working environment. "I think you get a bit of that claustrophobia or intimacy working on a movie set," she said. "After all, there are a lot of hours during the day and you're heading together in this rather limited space with the crew, and they actually become your family. We're here on this sound stage. It's our little world. You can go home and go to bed, but I don't think it's too far removed in that respect. Hey, I see an analogy there."

Although she briefly performed nudity in *CITY OF HOPE* and *CRIMINAL MINDS IV*, Bassett is still uncomfortable with scenes that require disrobing. "I was told by the director, 'You must be nude as you enter the DSU tubes to jettison yourself from one end of the galaxy to another.' I was a little anxious about that but we all had to be nude. So there's parity. That was equality."

Bassett has worked with directors Robert Zemeckis, Spike Lee, Wes Craven and *SUPERNOVA*'s Walter Hill (though Hill is insisting that his name be scratched from the credits). The actress admits that a director is indispensable to her craft: "He helps you—the actor—flesh out your character. The director has a sense of drama and the story."

"A lot of times, as actors, we read the entire story. But you're working on such a small part each day of the whole picture. So, for me, a director keeps the whole picture in his head and can help you with the art of your character. Somebody says, 'Pull back a little more' or 'We need more.' Today, for instance, we're doing a scene where I'm running from Troy and I stop on a dime and I see Nick in a doorway returning to the ship. I was maybe a little lax with it early in the rehearsal but I didn't know how much to give, whether to do full out or full tilt. How much danger am I in? So Walter [Hill] just helped me to pitch that, to find the right note. It's so out



Bessett & Eddie Murphy in Wes Craven's *A VAMPIRE IN BROOKLYN* (top): "The commanding actress has nothing to do but fret," beelies a *Washington Post* critic

of context for me in these technical movies that rely so much on space and space-ships. Sometimes I don't know where I am because we do it in such little pieces. Then they put it together as a whole. When you shoot something for four or five months, that's a lot of time when you're doing ten-hour

days—every day—and you don't start at the beginning of the film with the opening scene, and don't move along in linear fashion. You're just jumping all over the place. But Walter Hill has done a lot of work. He's quite a gentleman. He's quite kind, very smart, very prepared and he has a great crew."

SUPERNOVA calls for a

scene where the crew experiences weightlessness and Bessett found that even the illusion can be an uncomfortable experience: "We did several rehearsals in the harness before we shot that scene. I think I did pretty good. When I returned to my feet, I had an excruciating headache. I don't know if that has anything to do

with being turned upside down and the blood rushing to my head, but I'm sure it will look great."

An assistant heckoned Bessett back to the set. "I've grown to like Kasia," smiled Bessett. "I like her a lot. Her professionalism, her character, her strength. So I could imagine doing her again—if there were sequels." □

SUPERNOVA: "I perform this autopsy on one of the characters," recalls Bessett (left). "That was very difficult for me as I enjoyed that. It was interesting, along with the goo and the medical dialogue. I never played a doctor before." (Right) Bessett examines James Spader ("Our characters come to respect and need each other")



BLAIR WITCH

HEATHER DONAHUE

HER REFLECTIONS ON THE AUDITIONS, IMPROV, OUTTAKES, OPTIONAL ENDINGS, SUCCESS, THE SEQUEL & LIFE BEYOND BLAIR.

BY SARA BARRETT

July '99. I'm seated behind a dining room table in Denise Duff's home/studio. Duff, publicist Jennifer Shami and I munch on apple slices and tortilla chips. Only one question lingers within our collective consciousness: where the hell is Heather Donahue? The 24-year-old star of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* is almost an hour late for her photo session. Shami keeps flipping out her cell phone and pressing "memory," no response. It turns out that we didn't lose Donahue

The "home movie" as a media event
"For those who fall under its spell, this is a spiral trap," opined Time



BLAIR WITCH's Heather Donahue, making the transition from sickroom to studio, is flanked by Denise Duff's photographer Denise Duff and interviewer Sara Barrett.

to some sort of backwoods secretmanor but to heavy traffic.

Five minutes later, the Philadelphia-born actress bursts through the door, profusely cursing her own cell phone. Let's just say that she declared the phone technology to be dysfunctional. After apologies and more ranting about the deficiencies of Sprint, she greets Shami and introduces herself to Duff and me. The 5'8" Donahue hardly appears as pint-size as the *BLAIR WITCH*'s lens reduced her to: aams the trademark seek hat, baggy clothes and fatigue, she looks more like an image from *Vogue* than my original introduction to her as a teary, wide-eyed, half-

face that stared at me from web sites and movie posters. Still a little flustered from the late arrival, Donahue's mood brightens as she spots the costumes for her photo shoot hanging on a nearby rack. We all squeeze into the bathroom quarters where Duff, snapping open a huge black case, selects lipstick colors and brush sizes. As Donahue perches on a stool, I seat myself on the only accessible space in the chamber—yes, the toilet.

I wobble my microphone in the air—think of Barney Fife wielding a pistol—to pick-up Donahue's dialogue while steering clear of Duff's work space. The first thing that drops out of my mouth is a question about

BLAIR WITCH's auditioning process

"Auditions were held over a period of a year," replies Donahue. "Approximately two thousand people were seen over a year. I read about the audition in *Back Stage West*. I got so excited when I saw the ad. Most of the stuff that you see in there says, 'Nudity required, no pay,' which doesn't really rock my world. The description for *BLAIR WITCH* said, 'Fully improvised feature to be shot in the woods. Will be physically arduous and emotionally taxing.' I

thought, 'Wow! This sounds amazing!' Apparently a lot of other people thought so too, because it was incredibly crowded when I got there. I sat there for hours and they saw tons and tons of people. Finally, I was brought into the room with Dan Myrick, who was one of the directors which I didn't know at the time. He said, 'Well, you've served seven years of a nine year sentence. Why should we let you out on parole?' I said, 'Well, I don't think you should.' I made up this baby killer character, who induced other prisoners to throw pacifiers on her lunch tray, because there's nothing worse than a baby killer. He said, 'Okay, come back to-





Heather Donahue strikes a pose for Denise Duff. "She is charming and twinkle," says Duff. "We wanted to work with outfits that one would definitely not wear in the forest."

tomorrow.' It didn't matter what you said. If you answered the question without any hesitation, you were brought back the next day. That just got me even more excited because I had done improv movement theatre and I had done improv comedy, but I had never done a full-length, improvised, long-form feature. That's something I wanted to be a part of.

"The next day, they started using scenes that they had in their basic story outline, things that later became scenes in the film. They would give us set-ups and put the three of us in a room, like they did in the film. They would give us each a sheet of paper. We weren't allowed to look at each other's sheets of paper, so all you knew were your instructions. One scene was set in a diner. We were having a final production meeting before going into the woods. We did that with a bunch of different people. Josh [Leonard] ended up being the first person that they cast. From then on, Josh read with all of the other people auditioning. They needed three people

"People are more willing to believe something that is shot on video than on film. That is kind of scary. It's a pretty powerful medium for fucking with people."



The only thing that Heather Graham (l) has in common with her SLAM WITCH persona (r) is a trademark sock hat that's modestly tried to the film's publicity



who had a workable chemistry. Josh, Michael [C. Williams] and I ended up being the three that jelled together. Even after they brought me in for the first round of callbacks, they ran an ad again just looking for women I called [co-director] Ed [Sanchez] and asked if they were still considering me. He said, 'Yeah, you don't even have to come back for this one. We're just seeing new people.' I said, 'You know what? I think I'm going to be there.' There was

no way I wasn't going to be there. I was going to defend my turf, dammit. I wanted that job and I was going to sit there all afternoon to get it if I had to. So I went in again and it was just so intimidating to see herds and herds of new girls. I couldn't figure them out. I didn't know what they wanted that I wasn't giving them.

"They really had in mind this glowing, golden, luminous heroine who was going to swing the guys over her shoulder and march them

out of the woods. If you have to justify putting a camera in people's faces—especially when they're incredibly upset, tired and just sick of it—you're not going to be a saintly, martyr-like character. And that's not a likable character, right off the bat. That's somebody that a lot of people are going to perceive as very annoying. So I wasn't what they were looking for, but I ended up changing their idea of what they were looking for. I based the character on

somebody who I worked with. She was one of these people who would just bark orders at people, totally oblivious to the conditions and lack of necessities. It all started the day after I graduated [from Philadelphia's University of Arts]. We were in this warehouse in Pennsylvania. It was about 110 degrees. She didn't even provide water for the cast or crew, and yelled at us for looking exhausted. I tried to similarly think of my character as 'She has a job to do. She has saved a lot of money for a long time for this project, and she's worked very hard to make this a reality. She wants it to come off well.'

"I ended up changing their minds about the heroine character and they decided to cast me. Dan Myrick told me the deciding moment was when he saw something obsessive and slightly psychotic in my eyes at one of the callbacks. Originally, it was Mike who disappointed first. He was behind the camera, screaming for us. I was miming a video camera. I was going to look for Mike, who was lost in the woods, and I guess I looked right by the camera. They were using to tape the audition and they just saw something in my eyes that told them, 'This girl could fasten herself to a video camera and photograph people's faces 24 hours a day.'

"I ended up having five callbacks. People around me started asking, 'What is this project? Why do you keep going back? Is it that good that it's worth waiting afternoon after afternoon?' I said, 'Well, yes it is. I really want this part.' I would tell them, 'I'd be going out into the woods with these two guys and we'd be taping everything and there would be these [directors], a hundred yards away from us, watching over us.' My mother was like, 'You've got to be kidding me. There's no way in hell.' Everybody around me started to be like, 'Oh, I don't think you should do that project.' I started to

THE MAKING OF THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT

THE FILMMAKERS DISCUSS BEHIND-THE-SCENES CONTRETEMPS, BUDGETS, FAVORITE FEMMES, STUPID TITLES AND THE FUTURE.

BY SANDI WEISS

Corporate studios sink millions of dollars in special effects, but the suits can't buy a hint, the slick technology developed for *BATs*, *STARSHIP TROOPERS* and *DEEP RISING* didn't draw audiences. Last year, two rookie producers found an audience that paid over \$150 million for the privilege of being scared shitless. Never mind that the total budget for optical effects was zero. The filmmakers, in fact, admit that *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* was produced "for the price of a Jeep Cherokee."

"Sticker price?" I asked. "Yes, the sticker price of a Cherokee," replied one of the film's co-directors. "But not the *Grand Cherokee*."

"CD player included?" "Yeah, you could get a CD player, but not really too much else. Maybe power windows."

At 6:30 in the evening of June 30th, 1999, I stood in a line that wrapped around the block of Baltimore's Charles Theatre. *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*—which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival, then picked up by Artisan—was packed to the fire exits at \$20.00 a pop. Once inside the theatre for the 7:30 sneak, I cranked my head around to glimpse John Waters, who was sitting one row behind me in the midsection. I suspected his seat may have been pimped by default rather than personal selection. There hasn't been this much buzz since scalpers sold tickets to *THE EXOR-*



It's Dan Myrick & Eduardo Sanchez, *BLAIR WITCH*'s co-creators/co-directors. "We had written a script that had no dialogue. Heather Graham just let it rip."

COST

The lights dimmed and *BLAIR WITCH*'s back-ground story crawled on screen. The audience tittered at appropriate junctures until the film took a sober turn. I didn't hear another peep until the movie's concluding two minutes. Then silence again, until the credits faded and the film reel had snapped. One patron hoarsely pleaded for the lights to come on.

Hot Tamales

On the sweltering first day of July, the directors of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*—Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick—rendevous with yours truly at Paolo's in Towson, Maryland. Our interview was abruptly intruded upon by fire alarms and a precaution to evacuate the restaurant. Fire engines screeched to a halt by the curb, hoses were unspooled across a pave-

ment that sizzled like a heated skillet. Instinctively grabbing his handheld Camcorder, Myrick panned the trucks and then doctored to simulate a fireman's p.o.v. Had Paolo's been perishing in a fiery inferno, our interview may have been indefinitely postponed because Myrick and/or Sanchez would have been directing the officers and fire personnel. Art imitating life imitating art? Either way, the boundaries are blurred.

Finally, I resume conversation with the guys at a picnic table. It turns out they're very flirtatious, relaxed, down to earth...

"Let's talk about the movie," I began over a plate of calamari.

"Which movie are you talking about?" replied one of them.

And witty.

Without A Net
Bereft of viscera or spe-

cial effects—often the genre's raison d'être during the '80s—*THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* literally keeps its audience in the dark. So why does it unnerve sophisticated scribblers like *People*'s Laura Schiffrin?

Myrick took this one: "I think there was a lot of tension. There's a difference between tension and violence. The tension between the three actors was palpable. Every now and then, they'd hit that camera. And you're thinking, 'They are about to kill each other.' But they are forced to be together. The only thing worse than being there is being there and separated. That just contributes to that edge-of-your-seat unpredictability. What's going to happen next? Who is going to explode at who? So you've got that thing going on and then you've got the Blair Witch out there—somewhere!—who's going to come out every night."

"Also, our film is shot in the first person," Sanchez piped in. "You are there! And the fact that it's shot like a home movie, the audience is immediately like, 'Is this real?' That's why we kept the monsters out of it, kept the gore out of it, kept Brad Pitt out of it... because he was calling us. He kept calling and calling...he was relentless! We kept anybody who was recognizable out of the project so we could develop that home movie facade—that plus the fact we had no money and no connections."

The filmmakers declined

to fade-out the movie with a physical embodiment of the Blair Witch because "we didn't want to betray the rest of the film. The ending is open to interpretation."

Reaffirming Heather Donahue's vignettes about improvisation, Sanchez demonstratively noted that "None of the dialogue was scripted. Dan and I wrote a script that basically had no dialogue." Speaking of Donahue...

HELL BENT FOR LEADER

Donahue's character, the catalyst for THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, is not portrayed as a babe in the woods. I ask Sanchez and Myrick why, of the three characters, they opted to appoint a woman as the principle player.

"We wanted a chick on the set...she's pretty hot," Myrick shrugged. "Nanah, Heather was just very strong! I think it would just be more interesting to have a woman in that role, but really we were just casting for people who would be able to be convincing. We weren't really saying, 'So this has got to be a guy,' or 'This has got to be a woman.' She just came through as being someone who was believable on all levels. You would believe that she would keep the camera in their faces when they said, 'No!' You would believe that she would be the kind of person who would be interested in the Blair Witch legend. You would believe that she's strong enough to manhandle these two guys when they were bitching at her. She just was an amazing personality, man or woman!"

"She had a lot of strength," added Sanchez.

"As an actress," rhapsodizes Myrick, "Heather ran the whole range of emotions, from being naive filmmaker to a terrified, sympathetic individual. Her talent was...well, amazing!"

"Just phenomenal," added Sanchez.

I switch off my tape

"Our film is shot in first person. Add to that it's shot like a home movie. The audience is like, 'Is it real?' That's why we kept monsters, gore & Brad Pitt out of it."



"We had no money." Myrick (l.) & Sanchez (r.) meet the producers (Robin Davis, Greg Hale, Mike Monahan). "There's a difference between tension and violence."

recorder as the filmmakers challenge each other in an ad hoc competition. It got pretty brutal. A few minutes later, they resume discussion...

"We were casting for personalities as much as we were for their acting ability," said Myrick. "We were just looking for three of the most effective people and the dynamic—that they're acting but just being themselves. One was really strong, one was funny...we cast Mike [C. Williams] because he was just hilarious. He's got that natural ability. Josh [Leonard] just blew us away at the audition. He brought this intensity to the character. They were like many film students or people who we know. Mike is everybody, the buddy down the street. Everyone has known a Heather. And I think that everyone has known a Joshua."

"We wanted to cast people who were real, whom everybody could identify with. We cast the actors to be one step removed from the characters. Most people

who have seen the movie plug into one of these characters or all of them. That is what makes the movie that much more compelling. You're on the ride with them. They are all real."

"Each actor reaches into his or her psyche and pulls out a lot of rage—was that all about acting?" I query.

"There was enough fighting going on among the actors to keep us occupied," said Sanchez.

"Yeah, they were pissed off at each other a lot," revealed Myrick. "We had a feeling that Joshua and Heather were going to be antagonistic. Early on in the film—yawn—they were just at each other's throat. They were vying for the lead role. We'd tell them to turn the tension inward and bring all that angst into the character. So it was a combination of how they really felt and how they channeled that into their characters."

"Heather was just hell bent on being the leader," recounted Sanchez. "That was her role. And Josh, at

that point in his life, he was very antagonistic. I think he targeted Heather. He was like, 'She's trying to be the leader here. I'm gonna fuck her up.' I think it got on Heather's nerves and she started retreating. Heather was over the top. She wanted to be in control and acted like a really insecure film student. She was someone who wants to have everything put together and doesn't really know what's going on. Then you've got this stoner film guy who is like, 'Whatever, man.' That dynamic worked great. We had to tone it down a bit as we were shooting. I'm told that Heather, Mike and Josh still keep in contact and will all be united soon in Los Angeles."

"We then turned to Heather's climactic 'confessional' scene ('I just want to apologize to Josh's mom and Mike's mom, and my mom. I am so sorry! Because it was my fault...I'm scared to close my eyes. I'm scared to open them...'). 'We had the scene scripted,' recalled Myrick. "But the dialogue was all her own. Heather Donahue turned the camera on herself and just let it rip."

"She's amazing!" sighed Sanchez. "I've never seen another actress be that emotionally naked in any role."

"The only thing I've seen as emotionally naked as that was HEARTS OF DARKNESS: A FILMMAKER'S APOCALYPSE," noted Myrick. "That's where Martin Sheen breaks down, literally, in his hotel room. But it was an outtake. That's the only thing that's even come close to what I've seen Heather do. It was an amazing performance. You know, Heather used to do commercials for Steak 'n Shake diner chain. She was a great Steak 'n Shake girl."

Isn't It Moronic?

So what's the next stop after making a home movie that turned into a summer blockbuster? Both filmmakers contributed to a compressed conversation: "We are



A scene from *HEART OF THE BLAIR WITCH*, an "adult" reimagining broadcast on the Sci-Fi Channel. The dystopic includes scenes, shot for the feature-length movie, which were excised but subsequently restored for this documentary.

doing a comedy next called *HEART OF LOVE*. It's a stupid name for a stupid film. That's basically the byline. It's the stupidest name we could come up with, that's the key."

They challenged me to "think up a stupider title," and—know what?—I couldn't. In retrospect, *HEART OF LOVE* even sounds more stupid than Mexican imports like *WRESTLING WOMEN VS. THE AZTEC MUMMY*.

"It's just like *MONTY PYTHON* meets *AIRPLANE* and runs into *NORMA RAE*," the filmmakers deadpanned. "It's the most moronic thing you've ever heard of. We've been writing material for that since film school."

HEART OF LOVE is backed by Artisan, distributor of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. "We'll see what happens now when somebody else is giving us money," said Sanchez. "Let's see how much control we get." A cameo appearance by the stars of *BLAIR WITCH* is, without a doubt, a complete uncertainty. A release date is likely for the end of summer. "Or late summer, 2012. Don't want to compete with those big boys yet," injected Sanchez. "The thing about

BLAIR WITCH is it's such an underdog that it can sneak in between the cracks. But *HEART OF LOVE* is going to be our real budget film."

As I flip a fresh cassette into the recorder, the filmmakers rattle off horror films that impacted them, including *THE EXORCIST*, *THE OMEN*, *GRAFFITI BRIDGE* (don't ask, Prince scares me, too) and *THE WATERBOY*. Their preferred *femmes fatales*: Sigourney Weaver in *ALIENS* and Linda Hamilton in *TERMINATOR 2*.

Redemption...

I inform the guys that John Waters was among the patrons at the Baltimore preview of *BLAIR WITCH*. "We were talking about that yesterday," said Sanchez. "It's pretty weird. Spielberg supposedly saw *BLAIR WITCH* a month before its debut. Just the fact that somebody like him would be watching the film... John Waters, whom we've admired since film school, came out and said, 'Oh, it really works. You guys should be proud of yourselves.' That's pretty cool."

"So it is kind of cool how the pre-Sundance Dan and Ed were these idiot film-

maker wannabes. And then, after Sundance, all of a sudden we're filmmakers now. All right, here we are."

"It's great, it's redemption, it's validation... it's all of the above," says Myrick. "It says, 'Okay, I haven't been wasting my time for the last 12 or 13 years. All the failures kind of slowly fade away. You've got one high point in your life. So if it all ends tomorrow, at least you've left something behind that people may see. It's a good place to be because you're not grappling with if you're ever going to break out or not. We've gotten over that one hurdle, but now there's a whole other bunch of stuff we have to do—like living up to *BLAIR WITCH* in our next movie. But they are good problems to have, so we're living a dream right now."

During our interview, the directors' cell phones were winking overtime. I broached a question that compared *BLAIR WITCH* to *THE EVIL DEAD*, but Myrick—rolling his eyes—finally acquiesced to take an incoming call. "Sorry," he grumbled while flipping the phone open. "This is soooo L.A." I have a feeling that Dan Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez will soon be unlisted. □

have second thoughts, thinking that maybe I shouldn't be involved. And then that fear sort of drove me to pursue the part.

"My instincts told me that these were good guys, they weren't crazy psycho killers. So when [producer] Gregg Hale called and offered me the part, I enthusiastically accepted but I did ask him if it was a snuff film. He said, 'If this was a snuff film, don't you think we'd have a better cover?' I said, 'Yeah, I would babe so.' And so it went. But I brought a big hunting knife, just in case. I read all these survival books about how to skin and roast a squirrel, and how to start a fire with a drop of water and a needle. I was as over prepared for this movie, it was ridiculous. I was expecting far worse. I wasn't expecting, 'Oh, so today we only give you a power bar and a banana.' I was expecting to be hunting for food. I learned what kind of herbs I could eat. I thought it was going to be really interesting. And it was really interesting, just not as harsh."

I'm pretty psyched by the film clinging to the concept of "not imitating life" (or vice versa): the actors didn't play filmmakers, they were the filmmakers. I ask Donahue if she and the two male compatriots were entirely enlightened to the film's premise when they started production. Through half-closed lips, which are in the process of being outlined in bright red, Donahue responds: "I knew a lot about the myth. That pretty much enabled us to create our own characters for ourselves. They didn't impose a lot in regards to that. I basically built my character before we went out there. Normally, you have a double consciousness as an actor. You have yourself and the character that are sort of working together in this weird, symbiotic way. In this case, you've got yourself, you've got the character, and you've got the filmmaker who has a lot in com-

mon with the character but has a whole different level of responsibility that somehow combine the character and the actor. You have so many things that you have to do. When we got out there, we would get these notes from the directors but—in regard to the characters, and how far we took these scenes and the kind of things we did in between—that was really left up to us.

"There's a lot of stuff that wasn't in the notes that ended up being in the movie—like Mike kicking the map into the creek. That was



"They had an alternate ending in which Mike, instead of standing in a corner, was crucified on a stick-man. Hokey shit. They stuck with the more ambiguous ending."



"After awhile, Heather [J] felt like one of my high school buddies," says photographer Duff. "Her sense of humor is endless." L: Donahue Duff as Blair Witch.

Mike's idea. That wasn't a director's instruction. Some of the scenes that were criticized as being obviously contrived were just stuff that we came up with. Like Mike's frustration that the map didn't mean anything, and our conflicts leading up to the map kicking. The only thing that was in the notes about the map was, 'Let Josh check it when he wants to.' It's funny to watch the movie now because there were a lot of things explained later on, in terms of how the story unfolded."

Did the actors ever conspire to read each other's notes? "No, we didn't," says Donahue. "That surprises a lot of people. Another thing people are surprised by is that we never rewound the tape and looked at what we did. We did break character. Sometimes you have to, it felt so claustrophobic. We were shooting in a park that was four square miles. It was not the vast wilderness that it was supposed to look like in the film. We ended up going to a lot of the same places. There was a scene

that made the final cut in which we end up back at the exact same area as the previous day. The instruction was to look around at what you see. I'm looking all around, wondering what the hell it is we're supposed to see that's supposed to motivate the scene. I'm like, 'What are we supposed to see here? I don't get it.' All three of us were like, 'What's going on? We don't see it.' After you see so many fallen logs and trees, you wonder, 'Is it the one you saw in the morning? Is it the one you saw in the afternoon? Who knows?' Finally, we looked at the GPS. You could look at a screen that had all your waypoints for the day. We saw that the waypoints made a big circle and realized that we were in exactly the same place that we had been in the day before."

Though the locale was geographically restrictive, did Donahue ever fear for her safety? "No," she replies. "We were told from the beginning, 'Your comfort is not our issue. But we are very

concerned about your safety.' So we knew we were going to be uncomfortable. We knew they were going to wake us up in the middle of the night and fuck with us. But we knew we were safe. They were looking out for us better than on a lot of other indie shoots. And for good reason. If something happened to one of us, production would come to a screeching halt. So there was a lot of trust put into us, which was really nice. So we had to be self-grating."

Wearing a gold dress and a fresh makeup application, Donahue crosses into Duff's studio. I take a (more comfortable) seat on a canvas-covered couch next to Shami and fire questions between light readings—like, "What was especially grueling about your being 'abandoned' in the wilderness?"

"Running water and indoor plumbing were sorely missed," nods Donahue. "You're in the woods for eight days. You're not washing your hair. You're staying in a tent with two guys. When are you really going to

change your underwear? Thank God the moon was far, far, far from where my cycle lay. That would have been a much different movie. It would have been a much gorier film."

We migrate back into the bathroom for a dress and makeup change. Duff applies glitter to Donahue's chest and I resume my former position. It's the advent of BLAIR WITCH's national debut; sneak previews have sold out, and chat rooms are filled to capacity with the buzz that the film is not a mockumentary but a documentary-gone-awry CNN, Fox News and ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT are covering the film's New York premiere. "I'm pretty damn happy with how the film turned out," grins Donahue. "You do something so long ago so it's such a surprise to get attention for it now. I showed the footage to people when I first moved to L.A., when I was trying to get an agent and generate interest in my work. Nobody was particularly impressed. Taken out of context, the footage looks like I was just on a camping trip with my friends. It was looked at as just a bunch of useless videotape."

We progress back into the studio, this time with Donahue wearing a light blue tulle dress that highlights her huge blue eyes. I sit back down on the couch next to Shami, who appears to be exhausted. She's been working overtime, fueling promotion for BLAIR WITCH on the eve of the film's multiplex screenings. I ask Donahue if she had speculated that a "home movie" would turn into a phenomenon. "No," she sighs. "Obviously, when we were working on it, I knew we were doing something different and interesting. But there are a lot of different and interesting things out there that never got purchased and never got distributed. I was recently at a party with a bunch of people I knew in college. It's weird to be the first person

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THE MAKING OF THE BARE WENCH PROJECT

NO SCRIPT, LOW BUDGET, IT'S LIKE "BLAIR WITCH"—EXEMPTING THE SCENES OF LESBIAN BONDING & NUDE BONFIRE DANCING.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Finally, there's something on which independent filmmakers can actually bank upon—specifically, the unbridled success of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. Produced on a shoestring budget (\$30,000-\$40,000), the film's record-breaking revenue thumbed its nose at Hollywood's "bigger is better" conceit. Circumventing art houses, *BLAIR WITCH* scored plum engagements at multiplex screens across the country. Even before it swept past a \$100 million gross (domestic), the movie spawned a profusion of imitations, ripoffs and parodies.

Upon realizing that *BLAIR WITCH*'s longevity would be sustained from summer to fall, exploitation entrepreneur Jim Wynorski—whose track record includes *CHOPPING MALL*, *SINS OF DESIRE*, *BODY CHEMISTRY IV* and *DINOSAUR ISLAND*—quickly negotiated a deal with Pay Per View executives for his own lumpsum. "I figured I'd go out on a weekend—Saturday and Sunday—and take four or five chicks up to the mountains and just shoot it," relates Wynorski. "It turned out to be a lot funnier and a lot better than I thought it would be. It was hilarious to make." Pitching his movie as *THE BARE*



Julia Strain (c) as the Bare Wench, endures 87mm dross. Julia K. Smith & Nikki Fritz. "We refer to our 3-girl love scene as Licki Tits," says Strain

TITS PROJECT, Wynorski was subsequently informed that Danni Ashe, whose software sovereignty has expanded to cyberspace, already "owned" the title. Wynorski opted for **THE BARE WENCH PROJECT**.

The plot (?) four sorority sisters research the Bare Wench legend for a school project. After six months of developing homework on the myth, the ladies travel to Bare Wench Mountain for an on-site investigation. According to folklore, a mysterious creature seduces campers while forcing their compatriots to "play hopscotch in the corner." The best defense against the witch, braless women. It seems they can't be lured into her tempestuous web.



B-movie veterans Julie K. Smith, Lonnae McComas, Antonia Dorian and Nikki Fritz were cast as the students whose collective IQ is below room temperature. Pin-up icon Julie Strain performed as the Bare Wench. Unlike the backyard locales photographed for competitive **BLAIR WITCH** spoofs, Wynorski shot his film in the wilderness. Convening within the director's home at four a.m., the cast and crew piled into a Winnebago and cruised into the mountains, stopping only briefly to stock up on provisions for the two-day outing. "We found streams, lake beds and a burned-out portion of the forest," recalls Wynorski. "We had a little pocket tent that we put up occasionally to shoot all our sequences, and we had lots of dildos and bras that we hung in trees."

Similar to **BLAIR WITCH**,

"It's much like BLAIR WITCH, no script! And the girls were great at improv. B-queens are better when not required to remember lines: they're fun being themselves."



Adrift on a lost highway, 3000s luminary Antonia Dorian (JEDAGHTE TEASE lip)—uniting with Wild Fritz (a) enigmatic Lonnae McComas (JUP DAWG) on the search for deflecting witches. "Pop your top!" L. Don't buy into this shot, director Jim Wynorski prefers northern exposure. R: Julie Strain as the Wench



cast, Wynorski's ensemble was encouraged to improvise. "Basically, it's very much like the original film," says the director. "It has no script at all. The girls didn't have to worry about lines, they just did their thing. It was hilarious. They were great at improv. I think most of these B-queens are better when they don't have to remember lines. They're being themselves, which is the fun thing. Julie Strain doesn't have any lines, she just does her scenes."

Strain managed to play her role without ever leaving her home. "I have a clause in all my contracts now that I'll film for their budgets, but they have to let me stay in my own backyard to do it," says Strain. "They made it really creepy. There's this pocket fence that's all crooked and rickety." To simulate the title character's nocturnal manifestations, Andy Sidaris—producer/director of bikini n' ballistics films (**GUNS**,

SAVAGE BEACH)—suggested a simple application of flashlight beams.

"They would be moving them around and spinning, making spooky shapes on my body," explains Strain. "It just became the most erotic scene ever, ever to be seen in a B-movie or independent film. We were trying to make it mood lighting like it was in a forest. Even though we had to use some plug-in lights, they would take the flashlights and move them fast around my body so it would create a dreamy effect. Andy Sidaris is in the movie as well. He plays Dick Bigdickian and he steals the show in the beginning. He owns this magic



chop and he talks about things that the Bare Wench did to him, like putting this hex on a little squirrel that's still all frozen and paralyzed. The three girls are interviewing townspeople with their camera about the Bare Wench. It's pretty much a word-for-word parody of **BLAIR WITCH** except everything has sexual overtones. Instead of building piles of sacred stones or whatever to resist the Bare Wench, the girls opt to go braless or topless as a sort of shield against it—that seems to do the trick."

Strain describes the film's manage a tree scene as "Likki Titz and that's because it involves Julie Strain, Julie Smith, Nikki Fritz, Likki Titz, get it? My bag scene is a dream montage. It's an eerie, spooky,

naked, frenzied, snake licking, ram horn beautiful, self-loving sequence. Then the other two girls join in. The two girls within the tent dream about me. There's a silhouette of those two large breasts coming at each other through the outside of the tent window, and it cuts to me spookily moving around in this Bride of Frankenstein-like robe with this long, white hair. It will send chills down your spine."

Blonde bombshell Antonia Dorian (BORCERESS), who had retired from film for one year, makes a comeback as Toni, the only now-cynic in the all-female coterie. "The Bare Wench was a prostitute and all the men in the town were sleeping with her," says Dorian, shedding more light on the legend's genesis. "They raped and tortured her and left her for dead, but she came back to haunt the people in the future. When men would find her, she would lay a curse on them and they would be found hop-scotching. It's so funny."

"I play a sweet girl who is in college with the other girls. In BLAIR WITCH they find the rocks...well, we find those dildos in a pile. I

Leslie McCasas (?) straggled off the nudity required by her BARE WENCH role (p. 7). "I supported myself on wet T-shirt & bikini contests."



pick one up and I have an orgasmic reaction to it. I had to fake an orgasm: 'I believe in Chloe, the Bare Wench. I believe she exists and I'm for the project.' Nikki Fritz's character, who puts up the money for the project, doesn't really believe in it. I'm the positive nice girl."

OF COURSE, BARE WENCH's raison d'être is



a surfeit of exposed breasts. So what contrivance was hatched for a flurry of scenes where tops are popped? Sample the scene of the women huddling around a campfire one evening, each intimidated by distant but ominous sounds. "I think Julie Smith's character says, 'I remember when we were topless, the noises were scary, so we have to go topless,'" says Dorian, setting up lamest sophism for nudity since ORGY OF THE DEAD. "I really like the dancing scene in front of the bonfire, which was really sexy-looking. We're all topless."

The film does furnish each actress with an opportunity to soliloquize dramatic dialogue. "I liked my orgasm scene and when we all had our own interviews," translates Dorian, "I had



Julie Smith (3) casts a spell that drives a saprophyte forest between Julie Smith & Nikki Fritz (5). R: Director Jim Wynorski & his BODY CHEMISTRY B starlet, Becky LeBeau

my own scene when they interview me about the Bare Wench. It was all improv. We were all kind of scared because we were in the middle of nowhere, out in the desert at night. It was really creepy. There was a scene where we were yelling at each other, and we didn't know how we would react. That was a really good scene. That's one of the reasons that I did it, because it was the first time that I had done improv in a film."

Julie K. Smith (RETURN TO SAVAGE BEACH) plays the equivalent of BLAIR WITCH'S "Heather" but points to significant differences between both movies. "Instead of one gal and two guys, there are four hot babes in our version," she says. "We were out there for two days and three nights. This had to be finished

within two weeks, and that includes editing and everything else. We stumble upon the leg, and do everything they did in BLAIR WITCH. But, again, ours is a hell of a lot more fun to look at: there's no men and lots of trife. Instead of the stick figures in the trees, we have inflatable sex dolls and the piles of rocks become enormous dildos."

I ask Ms. Smith to describe her motivation for performing in the buff (often an obligation in her film roles). "You get a little hot and you want to take your top off," she purrs. "It just happens naturally, which makes it even more beautiful because it's unashamed." In regard to the consequences of camping, Smith cites "the second night, it was scary and pitch black. The only light out there, be-

side our camera, was our flashlights. Just before the monologue scene that I do in the tent, we heard something. We looked out and, in the field about 35 feet out, we see a blonde head of a ten-year-old kid pop up. Now that really scared the shit out of us. We kept filming, but we were convinced that there were other people out



there watching us. Sure enough, we started doing another take and up popped another kid, who was hiding behind a tree. He took off running. How these kids got out there in the middle of nowhere in this field, with sticker bushes and tumbleweeds, we don't know."

Wynorski summarizes the film as "A hot. It cost very little to make and turned out a lot better than I thought. It's full-length and has a ton of good looking girls in it, doing the things you want to see them do. This delivers like Pizza Man. Everybody has done a ten minute ripoff of BLAIR WITCH—I mean, there must be a million of them out there—but this one is really what the sports fans want to see."

out of your peer group to be doing what everyone wants to do. It makes you feel guilty in some ways. But your friends are your friends. It's important to know in your life who those people are. When you have a successful film, a lot of people from your past tend to come out of the woodwork. Some of them I'm actually very happy to be back in touch with. There are some people that you just innately lose touch with and you're delighted to see them again. And then there's a whole slew of other people—and there's a reason why you haven't spoken to them in the last eight years. Because you never really liked them to begin with. There's this guy that I had such a crush on in middle school. I was such a loser. Nobody would dance with me at the dance and he was the only boy I wanted to dance with. Recently, he sent me an e-mail, telling me that he has this script that he thinks I'd be good for. I wrote back to him saying, "You can just forward it to my agency. I'll be happy to give you their address." I didn't want to be rude, but there is something of that 12-year-old girl still inside of me that remembers how stupid he made me feel."

Taking a short break, we head into Duff's living room. Shami flops onto the sofa and fiddles with her cell phone. Her gaze locks on the carpet. She's beat. Duff exits into the kitchen to prepare more refreshments. After munching on cheese and crackers, Donahue slips into a purple-feathered robe. "What really contributed to the film's cryptic credibility is that the actors address each other with their real names," I note.

"At the time, it sounded like a fine idea," explains Donahue. "But people really get confused by it. The movie looks so real and people just assume that it's you. I'm actually a much more relaxed person than my character. People are more willing to believe something

"The actors were pissed-off at each other a lot. Early on in the film, Joshua and Heather were just at each other's throats. They were vying for the lead role."



"Not unlike her BLAIR WITCH counterpart, Heather has a controlling & confident presence," says photographer Denise Duff. "I was really a bit star-struck."

that is shot on video than on film. That's kind of scary. It's a pretty powerful medium for fucking with people. You've seen video of your neighbor Sally's camping trip. Video looks familiar and the film plays on that aesthetic. It was the filmmakers' idea to use our real names. They were like, 'You guys are going to be so darn scared that you'll forget to call each other by your character names.' Now I've done a lot of plays—done a lot of different things—and nobody's ever slipped up like that in my experience. It was a valid part of the overall experiment. A lot of people, no matter what you tell them, do not believe that this movie is fiction.

"I was talking to this guy from a newspaper in Atlanta, and he said that he got the most outrageous call from a reader saying, 'Where did you do your research? How do you know it's not true? This is a cover-up!' A lot of people think we are actually dead. It's a weird situation to be in to have to defend your work

because it's too believable. It's the highest backhanded compliment you could get."

BLAIR WITCH's wrap-up scene has been very heatedly debated. Tracing Josh's screams to a deserted house, Heather and Mike—still operating their cameras—race into the shelter and belatedly record (non-visceral) evidence of its former occupants (i.e. tiny hand prints). Heather focuses on a frigid Mike, whose back is turned to her camera (an image foreshadowed by expository dialogue in the Burksville scenes). Heather's shrill screams are silenced when her camera (and presumably herself) slumps to the floor; the trio, one presumes, are victims of the Blair Witch. "I don't actually have an interpretation of the ending," shrugs Donahue. "When we shot that scene, I didn't even see Mike in the lens when I was shooting. So I really don't know. I heard one explanation that I liked a lot. It was that Josh and Mike got so sick of me that they decided to lure me to the house,

Josh was never actually abducted, he just ran away. He had conspired with Mike to lead me to the house and, while Mike is standing in the corner, Josh grabs me and finishes me off."

"The ending that wound up in the film was the first one we shot. They did shoot some alternate endings. They had an ending in which, instead of standing in a corner, Mike was crucified on a stick-man. Just hokey shit. So they scrapped those and stuck with the first ending, which is more ambiguous, and leaves a lot more to the imagination."

As we reconvene in the studio, Shami performs a double take: "Help! My cell phone's stuck on Hebrew!" She retreats to the living room for a nap. As Donahue strikes some poses, I inquire about her future plans. "In the next film I'm scheduled to shoot, I play a hooker with a heart of steel," she says. "I've been offered a few uninteresting things, which I've turned down. Right now, I'm being very particular. I've spent my whole life working for free or very little. In a way, that's kind of liberating. I would rather have a cheap and cheerful life, and make my own choices that I feel comfortable with, than be locked into huge monthly payments and constantly feel the need to take on projects that don't interest me. I think people sometimes want their movies to hit because they think it's going to make them happy, and give them taste and style and friends and love. It's ludicrous. If you don't have that going in, success is just going to fuck with you in a big way. This attention came so fast. It's great. But if it goes away tomorrow, so what? I can go back to doing regional theatre, which I was pretty happy doing before."

So did Donahue and her co-stars reap any of BLAIR WITCH's financial rewards? "Somebody in benefiting from all this, just not us," she explains. "Somebody

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THE BLAIR WITCH DOES SAN DIEGO

HEATHER ON HEATHER. SHE ALSO TALKS CYBERSPACE, SEXISM, WOMEN'S ROLES, HORROR, MOTION SICKNESS AND TINSELTOWN.

By KARLA G. VON HUBEN

The Hollywood white-kids are still scratching their heads over *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. A crude film by slick studio standards, it does everything wrong: the cast is limited to only three pivotal characters (played by unknown actors), there's zip special effects, no car collisions and nothing blows up. Though saddled with a \$40,000 budget, *BLAIR WITCH* grossed \$140 million in the U.S. and, during last year's Halloween season, "everturmed boxoffice records" in Britain (noted the London *Daily Mirror*). Its megabuck competition—*THE IRON GIANT*, *FIGHT CLUB*, *THE 13TH WARRIOR*, *TEACHING MRS. TINGLE*, et al.—tanked at the boxoffice. The success of *BLAIR WITCH* and *THE SIXTH SENSE*, another sleeper, may be indicative that the public is sick of movies fueled on teen angst, sociological humor and pyrotechnical displays.

THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT is unconditionally anti-Hollywood and the film's star, Heather Donahue, is heir to its anarchic attitude (i.e. she has no tolerance for bullshit). The genesis of Donahue's auditioning process is chronicled elsewhere in this issue (page 16). On the film's rustic locales in Seneca Creek State Park (Maryland), Donahue and her co-stars—Michael Williams and Joshua Leonard—improvised their characterizations. Their sole contact with the



Ms. Donahue slides a shot for *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*. The film's success has spawned a franchise, including shot glasses, a calendar, a CD game, et al.

directors were notes enclosed in 35mm film cans. But the cans were stored in a crate which the actors had to locate by navigating a GPS (Global Positioning System). Once the crate was tracked down, the trio unsealed their individual instructions—which they were prohibited from sharing with each other—and then winged their dialogue.

Almost concurrent with her appearance at a San Diego convention, Donahue had been cast in *BOYS AND GIRLS*, a comedy co-starring Claire Forlani (*MEET JOE BLACK*) and Alyson Hannigan (*Willow*) on TV's *BUFFY/VAMPIRE SLAYERS*. But she hardly sounded star-struck. "Looking at the whole Hollywood structure, I think—even now—for a woman to be taken seriously in L.A., and not as just a mindless little bimbo, you have to work extra hard. You've got to prove yourself doubly. That's part

of what my character in *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* is about—she has this job to do, and you're either with her or against her. And if you don't want to play, you shouldn't have come to the party."

One of the attendees noted that some patrons of the movie suffered motion sickness. One theatre's management passed out vomit bags and advised that anyone suffering from the impairment should be seated near the sides. "Had I known the film was ever going to be on a large screen, I probably would have tried to hold the camera a little bit steadier," smiled Donahue. "I thought maybe I'd just have a video copy to watch with my friends—that's sort of where I saw it going. But I do recommend that if you start to feel a little sick, leave for a couple minutes and come back. Or take Dramamine."

She adds that only footage not shot by the film's ac-

tors was an interview with "the guy [Mark Mason] wearing the baseball cap backwards."

Were the Burkittsville citizens, interviewed in the film's prologue, authentic town folk or actors? "I love the mom [Sandra Sanchez] carrying her baby, and I love the old man," said Donahue. "Those two were just people who I interviewed on the street. Looking back, there were just so many fortuitous little accidents in the making of the movie. How could I have possibly gotten that kind of response out of that little babe in arms? I mean, her mother first of all thinks she's heard of the Blair Witch and then the baby picks her nose and eats it. That's cinematic gold. You can't create that, you have to just be around at the right time and watch that happen."

Donahue talks about the choices she made as the film's mood turned incrementally darker. As an example, she declined to inform Mike about the film's only surrender to viscera—Josh's teeth, which are concealed within a bundle of twigs. "I wanted a cinematic vomit feel," explained the actress. "At that time, I thought it would be more effective for me to make that choice because Mike was already breaking down. I thought my character should really try to hold it together. She's trying to keep up hope, not give up. She has hope, up until the confessional scene, that they were going to find the



Blair Witch (right): Donahue, assaulted by the Blair Witch in her tent, is blinded by a flashlight. **After** (left): Assembling Hollywood, Donahue makes her point

car and get out of there."

She noted that restraining her emotion, as the assertive central character, facilitated her climactic, unfettered performance of the confessional scene ("After so many days, my character just let it go—you can open up the floodgates and they just won't close."). The actresses improvised the dialogue. Her only instruction was a note in a film can ("You are going to die, try to make amends."). "I made it really, really long so there's tons of the confessional scene that wasn't even used," Donahue recalled. "I really wanted them to use that—I knew that was my money shot, let's face it. I wanted to make sure they had plenty to work with."

The actors' intensity was sustained by an unpredictability of events written instructions were sometimes nebulous, declining to telegraph the "horror" of a scene. "You would always know something big was coming when your note would read, 'Okay, we're going to have a big fog with a sign on it. When you pass the big fog with the sign on it, make sure the camera is on!' We'd all look at each other, take a little break and

say, 'Okay, you guys ready?' This is supposed to be a big one, are we all together here? I'm feeling the fear.' Then you check it out, shoot it, act in it and move on."

The actors communicate a need for relaxation "by saying 'faca!'" We all agreed that it was a two-time, and we'd take a break and look out for each other, making sure that nobody sprained an ankle. When we were ready to go back in, we'd say 'scenario' which let us all know that we were on the same page. I would never turn the camera on when somebody didn't want it in his face."

Unlike Hollywood's vision of "horror"—routinely an animatronic/CGI-driven thingamabob—the Blair Witch was literally kept in the dark. "The whole concept was based on the fact that your imagination can scare you," said Donahue. "It's like a mad-lab horror film, you have to fill it in with your own thoughts and neuroses, whatever they may be. You're summoning your own bogeyman that hides out in your closet and under your bed. We don't want to make it easy for

"I'm proud of my performance in BLAIR WITCH. But the thing I'm especially proud of is that Hollywood does not know what to make of the movie's success."

you."

While still in its embryonic stage, THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT was promoted in cyberspace. Word-of-mouth drifted from chat room to chat room. The base of operation was a consistently updated website (www.blairwitch.com). Why was the publicity limited exclusively to this medium? "Money," volunteered Donahue. "There wasn't a budget for that." The actress, in fact, perceives the film's

laughter "Isn't that one of the finer points of the horror genre?" she howled. "How else would the audience ever get to scream at the screen, 'Don't go in there!' and 'What are you—stupid?' It's a convention of the genre. Personally, I would never have gone in there."

So will Donahue capitalize on the BLAIR WITCH bonanza by probing into equally juicy roles? After all, co-star Joshua Leonard subsequently landed subparts in CITY OF BARS and NAVY DIVER (cast of the latter film includes Charlize Theron and Robert DeNiro). "As a woman, there's a big difference, there really is," she explained. "It depends on where you want to go with your career and, quite frankly, I'm not in a huge hurry. You only have a very small window of opportunity where you get to be the flavor-of-the-month girl, and I obviously want to bank on that. But I also want to have a career as much on my own terms as I possibly can. And I want to do work that I'm proud of. And if that doesn't happen today, so be it."

Will BLAIR WITCH encourage Hollywood to develop a latitude for experimentation? "I hope to God it does!" exclaims Donahue, who's rooting for the little guys (aka the indies). "The biggest thing that I'm proud of is my performance in this movie. But I think the thing that I'm most proud of is that Hollywood just does not know what to make of BLAIR WITCH's success. It's a good thing for underdogs everywhere. Just get out there and make your

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marketing as a pioneering influence. "No movie has been marketed so heavily by using the Internet. You can put on a 30-second commercial, but people don't spend 30 seconds on a website. They spend 30 minutes on a website, and they'll go back the next day and spend another 30 minutes. I was a temp, I know. That's what makes it a group thing, and then you have a discussion group in there. People are talk about the cast and what it's about."

I popped a question that has been nagging me since my initial screening of the film. "In BLAIR WITCH's fade-out scene, you follow screams into a haunted house. With the Blair Witch on your trail, and seeing noises and hand prints cluttering the walls, why didn't you just get the hell out of there?"

Donahue collapsed in

THE MAKING OF THE EROTIC WITCH PROJECT

NO SCRIPT, LOW BUDGET, IT'S LIKE "BLAIR WITCH"—EXEMPTING THE SCENES OF LESBIAN BONDING & NUDE BONFIRE DANCING.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

When producer Michael Beckerman shot *THE EROTIC WITCH PROJECT*, his parody of *you-know-what*, he didn't have a clue that he was competing with a couple dozen low-budget films that milked the same cash cow. Beckerman's Seduction Cinema, a unit based in New Jersey, had already filmed *TITANIC 2000*—passengers include sapphic vampires—in 1998. Technology, developed in post-production, delayed its release until 2000 (past the point of profiting from the video promises of James Cameron's saga). But *EROTIC WITCH* was shot and edited right on the heels of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*'s boxoffice success for quick dividends. "We thought we'd do an erotic spin of *BLAIR WITCH* for fun," said Beckerman. "Without thinking about it too much, we proceeded quickly because if we thought about it too long, we'd figure out how silly it was and wouldn't do it. So we just did it."

A friend's property (several acres in northern New Jersey) served as the film's surrogate wilderness. Beckerman recalled that he and director John Barchiesi subsequently "assembled the cast. We had just wrapped *GIRL EXPLORES GIRL: THE ALIEN ENCOUNTER*, and decided to rehire three of that film's actresses. Katie Keane, Darin Caine and Victoria Vega play three college coeds who search the woods for the Erotic Witch.

"They were very easy to work with on *ALIEN ENCOUNTER* and off the set we were able to have a great time just goofing around so we knew that they'd be able to play off of each other very well. They're different. Katie Keane has a prim, blonde, girl-next-door look to her; we cast her as the uptight college girl. Darin Caine was cast as more of the extroverted character who is always talking and the first



EROTIC WITCH turns Katie Keane into a swinger! Photographing Victoria plays, "Katie exudes a raw sexuality in conjunction with her girl-next-door wholesomeness."

person to always press the alarm button. We cast Victoria Vega for a more rugged look. Her character supposedly has never had sex before with a guy, and she had a good look for that. All three girls are fairly new to doing films and have no problem with nudity. As an ensemble, it worked great."

Emulating the style of *BLAIR WITCH*, the film is shot in a pseudo-documentary style, often from Keane's point of view. The background legend: a 17th-century nymphomaniac seduced an entire town. Her sexual proclivities finally became too overindulgent for the villagers and they banished the woman into the woods. She naturally evolved into the avenging Erotic Witch, whose passions are so in-

tense that even the sexually subversive townspeople avoid her forested milieu.

"Katie Keane and her friends go camping," said Beckerman. "They're looking for clues to see if this witch really exists. The Erotic Witch eventually possesses the girls individually and collectively. Since none of their boyfriends are around, they wind up sort of sexually exploring each other. It has a very voyeuristic feel to it. So, little by little, each girl is being possessed by this force and by the end there is just erotic mayhem."

Darin Caine, who professes an affection for horror and sci-fi films, recounted her recruitment into *EROTIC WITCH*. "I got bored with modeling and, two years ago, decided to branch out into nude modeling. I've done magazines like *Extreme Fetish*, *Leg Show* and *Playgirl*. Later, I started doing softcore videos for Pay Per View and Adam and Eve, and then hardcore stuff with women. I met the guys over at E.I. Independent Cinema through an agent. Seduction Cinema, E.I.'s 'erotic' home video label, cast me in *THE ALIEN ENCOUNTER* and then they asked me back to do *THE EROTIC WITCH PROJECT*. I played the nymphomaniac. All she wanted was sex which was fun, because that's how I am anyway. We had three days in the woods, mosquitoes and all."

Making her debut in *THE ALIEN ENCOUNTER*, newcomer Katie Keane has already posed for men's magazines, organized her own website and performed in several girl-girl videos. The very photogenic blonde could pass as the twin sister of actress Jacqueline Lovell (formerly an on-screen practitioner of girl-girl trysts, who had been linked to Surrender Cinema's softcore/sci-fi hybrids). "I love girls and I love shooting nude stuff," grinned Keane. "But in *EROTIC WITCH*, I'm the nebbish one. I never saw *THE*



Top: Victoria Vega, Sherin Calme and Katie Keane: the latter started solidifying a confessional scene (*The go home & no need, And I feel good*).

BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. It isn't my type of movie. But they tell me I'm like the Heather Donahue character. I'm the one behind the camera. The film starts off with me giving a little speech to the camera, explaining the origins of the legend.

"But, unlike Heather Donahue, I didn't really do the actual filming. I stood beside the real cameraman and shouted—it's an amazing simulation of me holding the camera. Of course, I came out in front of the camera to do all the sex scenes. I got to do that confessional scene from **BLAIR WITCH**, where I'm really scared and apologizing to the families of the other girls. They got me to repeat that routine hut, instead of my eye, they focused the camera on my breast. Halfway through this really intense scene, the *Erotic Witch* makes me horny as I'm speaking on-



Left: Katie Keane and Sherin Calme make friends. Thanks to the influence of *Pia Fendi* which "I love girls & I love shooting made stuff," notes Keane

camera. All of a sudden, I do this whole little masturbation scene. It's kind of weird because I go from parading to having an orgasm."

"I love the end of the film where we have this beautiful campfire," continued Keane. "Darian, Victoria and I sort of pile on top of each other and have a little love fest. It's pretty funny because they threw in this man in a gorilla suit who runs around in the movie with a blow-up doll."

A guy in a flea-bitten ape suit, extras who look like toxic Bowery Boy derelicts, starlets improvising lines ("The 'erotica' just chills me"), it's less cinema verité and more like a hamstrung Ray Dennis Stockler hawking his pop's camera to make a sex movie.

"I just want to say that I'm really into girls and had a great time doing the movie," concluded Keane. □

BABES IN THE WOODS

A QUIET TOWN IS INVADED
BY FILM ADDICTS. MISSION:
BAG THE BLAIR WITCH.

BY SANDY WEISS



A photograph of a woman standing on a wooden boardwalk in a forest. She is wearing a black, floor-length dress with intricate lace detailing down the center. Her right leg is bent at the knee, and she is looking down at her foot. The background is a dense, out-of-focus forest with green foliage and tree trunks.

West France Fatales' interpretation of the Blair Witch: Kelly Kate models as the Sun-Kissed babe for photographer Susan Powers. Who wouldn't volunteer to vacation in the woods?



*"Hi. This is the town of-
fix, Burkittsville, Maryland.
At the sound of the tune,
please leave a message. If
this is in regards to THE
BLAIR WITCH PROJECT,
it is fiction; however, we wel-
come you to our community
and you'll see that we have
rich farmlands, mountains,
and a quaint village. So
looking forward to meeting
you. Have a good day. Thank
you."*

Burkittsville is occupied by 75 families, one post office and two churches. Residents of this terrain—1,065 square kilometers within Frederick, Maryland—were most likely born there. It's a very rustic, conservative community that doesn't pander to nightlife or tourists. But, last July, the sleepy hamlet was turned into a hotbed of notoriety. Outsiders, invading the town, were intent on smoking out the spectral nastiness of those campers. The town populace insisted the entire chronicle was a myth, nothing more than the conceit of a couple maverick filmmakers. But it was too late. **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT** practically drew a map to the town, replete with a pilot light that blinked in TV and print ads.

"In October of 1994, three student filmmakers disappeared in the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland while shooting a documentary. A year later, their footage was found."

Femuse Fatales, organizing a "glamour spread" in Burkittsville, contacted Kim Gough to pose for the shoot. Gough, a screenwriter, lives in Stevenson, Maryland. "My home is only an hour from Burkittsville," says Gough. "I wanted to work with photographer Duane Folcou, but decided to check-out the area and spot some of the locations in advance. But, arriving in

Sisters in sorcery (and in real life): Jennifer & Kim Gough, sticking it to "witch" stereotypes, are the buzz of Burkittsville. "A nice place to visit"

Burkittsville only a few weeks after BLAIR WITCH was released, I was promptly branded a "foreigner." The natives watched as I sheepishly snapped pictures from my vehicle. It wasn't exactly 2000 MANIACS but their facial expressions definitely communicated a very palpable hostility. Their lives had been changed, maybe forever, by a single movie."

Gough describes the community as "a very real incarnation of Mayberry. The houses and mom and pop stores still preserved in turn-of-the-century architecture, loom over a main street that's immersed in a brooding silence, even the slam of a screen door is but a barely audible echo. There will always be scandals and secrets in small towns but Burkittsville wants to keep its indiscretions to itself. It's an indelible part of the town's legacy to not sell out."

During her "drive-by" in Burkittsville, Gough "saw nothing unusual. I did stop to soak in a beautiful state park bordering Burkittsville that's near the Appalachian foothills. I thought the territory was certainly photogenic enough for our shoot. While in the wilderness, I heard twigs snapping behind me and realized I was being followed by a black bear. Luckily, it turned out to be as scared of me as I was of it."

These days, it's not easy to find Burkittsville. After reports of vandalism—rubbish fans pilfering personal property—civic leaders and one thief removed shingles and signs engraved with a "Welcome to Burkittsville" greeting. The first first townie whom I tried to interview immediately carded me and sent me packing.

A few days later, accompanied by a friend, I returned to the region. Pausing in the neighboring town of Middletown, we fueled the car, gazed down a couple of Dr. Peppers and became acquainted with Ethel, the Amore operator. Ethel, who grew up in Bur-

"While snapping photos, I could sense the natives' hostility. Burkittsville, once the incarnation of Mayberry, had been changed—perhaps forever—by a movie."



Small Weiss maps out Burkittsville. BLAIR WITCH fans take note from the local authorities: "There is no Tappan East Creek or Coffin Rock in or near our town."

kittsville, describes her birthplace as "a quiet, laid back, little country town, a very Christian town." She had not seen THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT.

"Have you heard about the film, Ethel?" "Oh, yes!" she chuckles heartily.

"Would you agree that Burkittsville has been substantially impacted by the film?"

"Very much so," she replies. "Some of the older people are just a wee bit upset, because there is really no truth to the movie. But tourists ask me for directions to Burkittsville all the time." Ethel is especially interested with the more youthful dissenters who "put burning candles on local graves. With the dry summer, there's certain risk for igniting a fire."

But the influx of journeyers hasn't been a total bummer. "A few people in Burkittsville have made little items that they have been selling," shares Ethel. "There was a lady in town who was making little stick

animals and she made quite a bit of money. And then there is that old corner grocery store that they opened up, which has been closed for years. Some of that stuff is very old and I understand they have been selling out. People are buying it!"

But she wasn't surprised that the local populace was not eager to talk to us. Ethel, on the other hand, was cool. She even let us use the restrooms.

Anyway, let's set the record straight: Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick, directors of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, selected Burkittsville as the film's central setting during an arbitrary drive through Frederick County Sanchez's family home is conveniently based nearby in Frederick.

Burkittsville has never been identified as Blair, and none of the film's landmarks (e.g. Coffin Rock) exist. And most of the lost-in-the-forest scenes were actually shot in Seneca Creek State Park (Montgomery County). Nevertheless, Burkittsville's wooded area and cemetery

have been stormed like the D-Day siege at Normandy.

Two Middletown librarians contacted to be interviewed, though both were shell-shocked by the abundance of media attention. "We get calls from all over the country, as far west as California," said one of the women, leaning back in her chair. "They're just ordinary people who are intrigued by the subject of the film. One woman who had watched CURSE OF THE BLAIR WITCH called. She didn't realize the documentary was phony. She was convinced a murder had taken place. I couldn't convince her that it wasn't true! That movie has great marketing! And that's all I can say!"

But, as Ethel had already disclosed, some citizens have boarded the BLAIR WITCH gravy train. Sample the Burkittsville Buritan, a local organization that conceptualized the Burwitch sandwich just in time for the town carnival. "They made a whole lot of money, which benefits our community," explains one of the librarians. She then inundated me with a pile of Xeroxed articles, originating from local newspapers, that were related in some capacity to

Weiss poses by a surviving Burkittsville sign. The region's folklore imbues the bloodthirsty Scalegarden.



THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. I forked over \$4.50 to the Burkittsville coffers for "use of the library copy machine."

Linda Prior, a community resident, has been selling souvenir stick figures as fast as her fingers can spin them. "BLAIR WITCH's influence on our town has gone both positive and negative," she relates. "Some people think it's really bad and they don't want people in town. Some people think it was a good thing, I guess, because they are selling things and making a profit on it, and meeting a lot of nice people. We've met people from all over the world. We welcome nice visitors—I do, anyway. As long as they don't destroy or pollute the town, it's fine." Nevertheless, Prior would have preferred *HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY* over *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* had she been offered the option of which film to shoot in her home town.

Private residents, sick of e-mails inquiring about the fabricated "rural legend," have created www.burkittsville.org to demystologize the Blair Witch (check-out one point of validation called "Truth? You can't

Sarah Wales, last seen at a Burkittsville florist, never returned to PP. Some say a witch ate her; others insist she landed a job with People

"We didn't know anything about the Blair Witch until April of '99. Later, in July, we realized it was a movie. From then on, it's been chaotic here in Burkittsville."



Sarah Wales, writer of this article, poses at a Burkittsville cemetery. The local vendors, profiting from the town's affluence with BLAIR WITCH, are starting up to \$100 per day. Merchandise includes shirts, t-shirts, postcards and stickers.

handle the truth?").

Joyce Brown, the mayor of Burkittsville, laughs in her reflection of all the turbulence. "It's been interesting to say the least. That's for sure! We didn't know anything about the Blair Witch until April of '99. At first, we thought it was just a story that somebody made up. And then, in a couple of weeks, we realized that it was a movie coming out, to be released in July. From then on, it's been chaotic here in Burkittsville, although we have had some positive things come from it. It's a conversation piece, needless to say. I understand that our website has been hit more often than ever before, and that's a lot for a small town of 200.

"But a lot of people are disappointed when they come here and find out that the movie was not true. There never was a witch and, hopefully, there never will be. A lot of these people had never heard about Burkittsville and they subsequently become interested

in our Civil War history."

The horror film had prompted some reformation in the town. "We've married up with Frederick County and are part of their website now, and we're working on one of our own," says the mayor. "The movie encouraged us to let people know about Burkittsville. I think that is a positive. Ours is burkittsvillemaryland.org and the one for Frederick County is frederick.md.us"

In regard to the consequences of the film's success, Mayor Brown cites the theft of a Welcome to Burkittsville sign. "We've had numerous violations, though I'd say nothing real serious. No one has been hurt. We, as a community, have dealt with this very well with the help of the Frederick County Sheriff's department and the Maryland State police. As far as people being photographed in the cemetery, it's not offensive to me personally, as long as they are very respectful and realize that it is the fi-

nal resting place of loved ones."

Summarizing the hysteria plaguing her village, Mayor Brown opines on the real curse of the Blair Witch: "I think the majority of people are aware that the movie is fiction; however, I'm sure curiosity increased even further when the film made the transition to video and DVD. You have to give credit where credit is due. These people shot a very inexpensive movie and it has reaped millions. But it has cost us added expenses, with extra security and supplemental police enforcement. We are trying to get new playground equipment and this has hit us hard."

Would the mayor consider capitalizing on the film's prosperity by developing a regional franchise? "Oh, yes. It certainly could help us out with some projects. Private individuals, who are selling things or want to contribute to the playground equipment, are certainly welcome to do that."

Ms. Brown points out that last summer's *RUN-AWAY BRIDE* was also shot in Maryland; too bad its outdoor locales didn't include Burkittsville. "That would have been neat," she says wistfully. By the way, the mayor has not seen *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*—matter of fact, she intends to indefinitely postpone a screening of the film. "The impact has been very significant," she says. "The community has dealt with it very well, and I just want to praise everybody for their tolerance and fortitude with everything that's going on."

Will Burkittsville ever restore its link to a tranquil past? Will it finally exorcise the Blair Witch? Not tomorrow. The populace is dressing one more curse: the movie's sequel or prequel. My inquiries about a BLAIR WITCH II drew unattractive responses from the townies—most of which I can't print here if I want to send my grandmother a copy of this issue. Hi Gram!



THE BARE TITS PROJECT

STOP ME IF YOU HEARD THIS ONE: 3 RANDY BABES AND A WITCH...

BY DAN SCAPPEROTT

It seems that every adult filmmaker on the map, who officiated some sort of BLAIR WITCH PROJECT burlesque, has insisted a singular title—THE BARE TITS PROJECT—was his or her idea. But it was Internet guru Danni Ashe who laid the first legal claim. Within weeks after the debut of BLAIR WITCH, Ashe's 25-minute short was shot and made accessible on her website, Danni's Hard Drive (www.danni.com).

"We have bi-weekly creative meetings where we try to parody current events, hot movies or whatever that's really popular," Ashe explained. "We try to spin a little boob parody out of it. We did a half-time show called the BOOB BOWL. We

did a parody of STAR WARS called BWA WARS (aka BOOBS IN SPACE). When the BLAIR WITCH PROJECT came out, it was just a natural for THE BARE TITS PROJECT."

The short film, shot in three scenes on property bordering the Angeles National Forest, offers Becky Sunshine, Julia Parton and Nikki Fritz as beaming starlets who saunter into the woods in search of a legend: it seems, back when Los Angeles was founded, a secretaries' chronic nymphomania prompted her banishment. Vowing to video tape the lusty spirit, our titular trio are drawn further into the wilderness by a stick figure. One plot pothole later, the ladies engage in a sapphic ménage à trois.

"They're looking for the witch," explained Ashe, "but they get a little sidetracked with each other and find out, at the end, that the witch has actually been filming them all the time. You never see the witch, but you see lots of nudity. We do a lot of girl-girl love scenes in our movies because that's what most people are interested in. We do everything in digital form because it's tailored for the website."

To further intrigue her audience,



BARE TITS PROJECT: Julia Parton (l) is tasked to unite with Nikki Fritz (who was also cast in THE BARE WENCH PROJECT, page 22) and Becky Sunshine.

Ashe devised a mock treasure hunt. "Aimee Sweet, Ashley Benson and yours truly—we were supposed to have known the girls—were giving people clues for a couple of weeks before we published the video," said Ashe. "We had little clips of models giving clues about where you might be able to find the girls. After two weeks hunting through the website and going through all of the clues, browsers could eventually locate the last video tape that showed what happened to the girls."

"BLAIR WITCH was something ripe for parody as you can see from all the parodies that are out there," confirmed director Dean Guillet. "That's exactly the type of thing we do. We made a stick figure with big boobs. It's fun, sexy and right up our alley. When casting, we were looking for girls who could appear plausibly compatible with an outdoor environment. Obviously, Nikki Fritz is an actress experienced at that. Becky Sunshine is very athletic and Julia Parton is a real outdoors kind of girl."

Parton, a nude model and exotic dancer whose credits include B&D videos ("buckle termen") fetishism and a few B-movies (VICE ACADEMY 3), insisted she'd "do anything Danni

my ass."

"While shooting, I had a chance meeting with my first husband, whom I hadn't seen in five years. He worked for the people who owned the property. He had from me all day because he thought I was still mad at him."

A former Miss Nude California and veteran of girlgirl commerce, Becky Sunshine—who has launched her own website (www.beckysunshine.com)—recalled "working with Danni: even before she became famous in cyberspace. She once came to my apartment and shot an amateur video with me. She's led the way for a lot of the women in our industry today. It's a show of how our times are changing."

"Much like Julia, I have to admit that, when I did BARE TITS, I hadn't seen BLAIR WITCH. I got my energy off of everyone else's excitement over the project. It was great working with Nikki Fritz and Julia Parton. They both have great, fun, down-to-earth personalities and they're really into the work. Danni works with a great crew of filmmakers and producers. The crew share a very focused view of what they're trying to achieve, and they brought out the best in all of us. I thoroughly enjoyed it." □

THE MAKING OF THE BLAIR FISH PROJECT

OKAY, THIS ONE IS REALLY LIKE "BLAIR WITCH," EXCEPT THERE'S NO PROFANITY, NO GUYS & IS CAST WITH JUICY GENRE BABES.

By MITCH PERSONS

It is a true truism. As soon as a genre film becomes a success, it's sure to inspire parody. Remember SILENCE OF THE HAMPS? Anyone remember REPOSESSSED, the 1990 burlesque of THE EXORCIST? The phenomenal success of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT has bred dozens of travesties, including THE BLAIR FISH PROJECT; but, unlike its competitive spoofs, this ten-minute vignette—written and directed by Will Huston—was cast with a couple of (burlesque) genre veterans.

Fantasy aficionados may recognize Stacie Randall from her acting apprenticeship with Full Moon movies (TRANCERS 4 & 5). Earlier this year, billed as Stacie Bourgeois, she played a supporting role in FROM DUSK TILL DAWN 2: TEXAS BLOOD MONEY. Her FISH co-star, Lucky Lambert, is no stranger to FF readers; the actress was interviewed, back in '96, on the set of WITCHBOARD 3: THE POSSESSION.

I rendezvoused with Lambert and Randall in the El Coyote restaurant on a hot, L.A. afternoon, one tailored for an unabated feeding of margaritas and nachos. "BLAIR FISH is about these three bikini-clad models—played by Stacie, Cassa Shayne and me—who go on a camping trip and are never found again," says Lambert. "All that is found is their videotape and their very fashionable swimwear. The scariest part of the film



"I've got no make-up, no prosthetics...and we're out of control!" Cassa Shayne, who plays Jane to Fabio's Tazzer on a commercial, is reeled-in by the BLAIR FISH.

is when these three run out of margarita mix. They scream, 'We're gonna die now!' And then they run out of ice. It's really all over after that point."

"We play our parts very campy and vain," continues Randall. "You get the jokes after awhile but, if you haven't seen THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, there is no way you're going to get the comedy in this film. Our situation is just as scary to us as the witch, or maniac, was to the people in BLAIR WITCH. We do go for the duplication of the film's camera angles, including the subjective shots, but it's all played for laughs."

"It was refreshing returning to comedy, because that's where I actually got my start. I did a lot of work in Florida for Disney, for The Comedy Warehouse, Epcot Center, a whole bunch of places. When my contracts expired, I decided I

was going to New York but I changed my mind and came out to Los Angeles on a whim. My first film here was EDDIE PRESLEY, with Duane Whitaker and Roscoe Lee Brown."

"I've done my share of comedy, too," picks up Lambert, "although most of it has been TV work. And I agree with Stacie, it's nice returning to a medium that is supposed to make people laugh. I don't get a chance to do as much comedy as I would like which is too bad, because comedy is almost like a muscle, so much timing and everything. When you are so heavily involved in a film as serious as WITCHBOARD 3, doing a comedy is almost like therapy: it allows you room to breathe as an actress."

"I've seen WITCHBOARD," cuts-in Randall, "and it is one scary movie. My favorite films have always been the kind that

scare me to death, ones like THE OMEN, A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, PHANTASM. I feel if I don't leave a theater really scared, I didn't have a good time. I thought the last five minutes of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT were wonderful, psychologically scary. And I loved the nighttime scene when [Heather Demahie] is running out of the tent and she's being followed by a camera through the woods. That was really scary, because you don't know what was going to pop out from behind the trees."

"You know, FROM DUSK TILL DAWN 2 was a good, gritty, gruesome vampire movie. The one scene I was in really didn't have anything to do with the supernatural. I played Robert Patrick's wife, and I have a dialogue with him until Bo Hopkins bursts in and messes everything up. Robert and I were coming up with ideas as we were shooting, and he could roll with them—just as I could with his ideas. It was like doing a dance."

"Spontaneity played a big part in a film Stacie and I did right before BLAIR FISH," says Lambert, who takes a bite out of a nacho. "It was a direct-to-video movie called DETOUR. There was a scene between Jeff Fahey and Michael Madsen. One is a bank robber, the other a cop and they were facing off with each other. They were supposed to be talking off dialogue at a rapid-fire pace but, midway through the scene, it

"It's all about three bikini-clad models who go on a camping trip & are never found again. All that is found is the video tape & their very fashionable swimwear."

looked as if that wasn't going to work. So the two of them just started throwing in these long, long pauses. Joey Travoita, the director, was too nice a guy to chew these guys out for changing things, so the pauses just kept getting longer. But you know something? It worked. It was off-the-cuff and it turned out to be very effective. DETOUR is where Stacie and I first met, and THE BLAIR FISH PROJECT is a by-product of our friendship."

"It sure was," smiles Randall. "I got a phone call from an old friend of mine, Will Huston, who was one of the production people on EDDIE PRESLEY. He told me he was writing and directing a takeoff on THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. He wanted to know if I would be interested in playing one of three sexy vapid models. I told him 'Yes,' and I asked him if he had cast anyone else yet. He had picked Coara Shayne, the girl who played 'Jane' to Fabio's 'Terzan' in the 'I can't believe it's not butter' commercial. But he needed a third girl. On a hunch, I phoned Lucky and found out that she was available. I rely on gut instinct. As the years go on, I get more consistently intuitive. I'm not saying there is a definite fate to every action we take every day, but I do believe in some element of it. Somehow you're going to wind-up close to the area where you're supposed to be."

"I don't necessarily disagree with Stacie," shrugs Lambert. "I mean, thanks to her hunch, I got a part in BLAIR FISH. But I also believe in purposely carving out your own destiny. For instance, I feel that I am just now coming into my

uniqueness and individuality. I know that I can carve out a role, and make it exclusively my own. Some people have that uniqueness to them from day one, but I think a lot of actresses in this town get caught up in trying to be what their manager or their agent tell them to be. Who you are is not always clear because of the game that you're thrust into in this industry. I think that in the last few years, I've just decided to say, 'Screw it, I'm going to do what I want to do.' You get to a point where you look around and say, 'Whoa, why are you trying to please all these other people?' Being who and what you are is enough." □

Lucky Lambert is belted (R) by a hottie Coara Shayne (L). "You outdo me! You made me break a nail!"



JOANNE RUBINO

AN ACTRESS APPLIES MUSCLE IN A CRUSADE TO CRACK THE BOY'S CLUB (HOLLYWOOD BRANCH).

By SANDI WEISS



Note: This is not a profile of a celebrity but an actress surviving anonymity and Hollywood. Depending who you talk to in this town, she's either a working woman or a feminist or one of many.

There's a demon locked within her, and she's performing her own exorcism. Put away your raincoats, she's not spitting pea soup, just opportunities. At the age of ten, Joanne Rubino already knew what she was born to do. They say that the quickest route between two points is a straight line. Adhering to that logic, Rubino has drawn her line from the tip of her toenail polish to Hollywood. And back again. This actress, who's fed-up with gambling time, has declined to sweet-out the cattle calls. She'd prefer to call the shots.

Rubino's resume is peppered with film and theatre credits that she has tallied during the past couple of years. But now she's yielding to a goal that predisposes her to explore uncharted territory for women. "I'm pretty sure that I can consider myself an up and coming filmmaker," she says. "Understand that I do that to create avenues for myself and the other actors

"Because I am kind of feisty & have a tough, outer shell, I'm matched-up with with those kind of roles. But I consider myself to be an apprentice filmmaker."



"I don't do a lot of
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line. It depends
on the situation.
I don't need the
money or expo-
sure that way."



"I'm a good person at heart, I don't believe in bullsh*t and there is a lot of it in this town. I'm attending UCLA so that the writing portion of my career can move forward."

around me. Producing isn't my number one aspiration, but I enjoy it. I look at it as a whole—the writing, the acting, the producing. I'd like to just sink my teeth into it and build projects. It seems a lot more exciting that way, instead of waiting for the right audition and then naffing it and then being restricted to a cog within the industry's 'acting' profession. I want to expand my horizons.

"But sometimes, getting the opportunity to do what you want to do isn't there," admits Rubino. "So I started creating my own. I have some people, who are already making it, that are behind me. So I feel good about it. I feel like it's going to just keep snowballing until the point where I won't have much time to do anything. I'm trying hard."

Writing is revelatory for Rubino because it "gives me a creative liberty. I want to conceptualize quality work while I'm doing stuff along the way that keeps me going while learning. I'm attending U.C.L.A. right now so that the writing portion of my career can move forward. But my heart is in the acting."

Rubino has written two feature-length scripts, *The Truth About David* and *Living For Annie*; she's raised money on her own to shoot the latter project. "That's where my heart and soul is going right now," she smiles. No kidding. Rubino wrote, produced, and stars in the film. Along with wearing triple hats, she's remitting a coterie of actors, applying serious conviction to the proverbial "Mind if I bring a few friends along?" bromide.

"The one project, as an actor, that I'm most excited about right now is HOLLYWOOD ROOFTOP," confides Rubino. "It's written and directed by Steven Deuter. It's also one I would be proud for everyone to see, since it's very demonstrative of my work. The whole project was well put together and all of the actors were really involved." Rubino de-

"I am definitely a character actress. I'm not a drop-dead bombshell who can just walk-in and get the part because I'm beautiful. It's all about attitude."



"I weigh about 108 pounds," says the 5'1" Rubino. "But I have some muscle to my body. I'm strong & little." R. is making for a badass role in *THE GROOM*.

scribes her character, Dakota—a hooker who has a change of heart—as "pretty interesting. That's for sure."

In the event that Rubino eventually earns autonomy, which actor would qualify as her prime choice as co-star? "Gary Oldman. His body of work is just incredible. He's a theater actor, he transforms himself into anything. He just amazes me. Here's a guy who plays Boothwyn in one movie (*IMMORTAL BELOVED*), Dracula in another movie, *8id Vicious* in another movie (*SID AND NANCY*). I've never seen anybody in my life pull off what he does. And you believe him no matter who he is, and that's me." Rubino identifies with her idol: "I am definitely a character actress. I'm not—well, you know—a drop-dead bombshell who can just walk in and get the part because I'm beautiful. I think it has to do with an attitude and

[Gary Oldman] definitely has it. And when I get roles, it's because of that same thing...which I like. It's a good thing and it feels better every day."

Don't confuse her ambition with audacity. Rubino has values and limitations. "I don't do a lot of nudity," she shrugs. "There are certain places I draw the line. If it goes in a certain direction...well, I don't need the money and I don't need the exposure that way."

Although, it's not polite to reveal a lady's ego, I will share that our 5'1" warrior appears younger than she actually is. "That is the one thing I hear probably every day," muses Rubino, attributing the laudatory comments to her shape. "I weigh about 108, but I have some muscle to my body. I works for me. I'm strong and little. I'm fitness oriented, I guess you could say. I don't compete or

anything like that. I just happen to have one of those physiques. I'm an admirer of Xena."

The actress developed a "Piper" pseudonym, a moniker that has bred some familiarity among her fans. "My mother gave me the name when I was a teenager. I had a date with a guy who looked a little like a rat, and a few rats followed. So my mom called me 'The Pied Piper' since I always seemed to have rats following me around." (I can relate. I was christened "Dances With Ducks" in college.)



Hollywood has demythologized a classic icon—the liberated woman whose crusades crack the corporate Guy's Club—into a "bitch" stereotype. Rubino subverts the ice queen image while deflecting any pretense of vulnerability. She attributes her evolving persona to experience. "I have a really, really big heart," she says. "Because I am kind of feisty and I have a tough outer shell, I'm matched-up with those kind of roles. I don't believe in bullshit and there is a lot of it around this town, maybe in the whole world. But I mean, I'm an honest, hardworking person."

You gotta admire a woman who takes the initiative to make her own luck. I'd like to think that Piper will open the L.A. floodgates for other femmes, whose gumption is somehow reinterpreted into petulance. □

CAMERON DIAZ BEING JOHN MALKOVICH

THE FORMER MODEL & CO-STAR CATHERINE KEENER TALK HAIR, HOLLYWOOD, SAPPISM AND LAST YEAR'S SURREAL CULT FLICK.

BY DAN PERSONS

You couldn't imagine more hysteria in one hotel room had you gathered Robert Downey Jr., Jack Nicholson, Keith Richards and Charle Sheen together and unlocked the honor bar. We were at the press junket for **BEING JOHN MALKOVICH** and, adhering to the expected



WB Catherine Keener (l), whose film credits include **OUT OF SIGHT** and **MM...**, finally get inside the head of **BEING JOHN MALKOVICH**'s title character (r)

level of orientation at such functions, the publicists had seen fit to cram some 20 or so journalists into a room that might, at best, comfortably accommodate ten. Into this ungodly macabre they released co-stars Cameron Diaz and Catherine Keener. Certain, evocative images spring immediately to mind: Christians to the lions, Elvis Presley to a horde of 1960s teeny-boppers, et al. Two words, though, seemed to say it all: *feeding frenzy*.

And you'd hardly know it to look at

them. Seated at a circular table around which a bevy ten or so reporters had tenaciously dug-in—the balance of the press corps forming an envious periphery around the walls of the tiny room—the two actresses smiled and endured the pandemonium that swirled around them with remarkable grace. Here before us, Keener and Diaz didn't quite boast that extra dose of glamour that's automatically imparted by the Panavision camera, yet you could still sense the star pow-

er—albeit at a more accessible, human level—that gets lowly journalists clawing over each other like a pack of caffeine-infused wolverines.

With no small amount of poise, the actresses answered the questions put to them, punctuating their responses with quick, smiling glances to each other, as if they were the best of friends, as if they couldn't wait for all these intruders to leave so they could finally get down to the serious business of ordering a pizza and doing each other's hair. They are friends, actually, having begun their relationship in a distinctly Hollywood fashion. "I married her husband in **MY BEST FRIENDS WEDDING**," Diaz said, referring to actor and Keener spouse Dermot Mulroney. "I'm quite a fixture in the Mulroney household."

She went on to point out how that "family" connection certainly helped when it came to this latest project. "I was cast [in **MALKOVICH**] about three weeks before they started shooting. My agent knows that I love working with friends, because you can spend time with your friends on the set and have a good time. Catherine and I are really good friends, and I'm such a fan of her work and the films she chooses. My agent said, 'Keener's doing this movie, you gotta read it, you're gonna love it, it's totally your



Cameron Diaz: "I've never since thought, 'Oh, is that it? I've reached a point that can further my career?' It is not about that for me. It's really the scripts I read that reach up, and slap me across the face, that I want to do."

thing."

Note to those of you searching for your own agent—here's what Diaz thought was right up her alley: a film in which John Cusack plays Craig Schwartz, a disgruntled puppeteer who takes a day job at a filing company and discovers a doorway that allows these entering to spend 15 minutes in the mind of John Malkovich (played by John Malkovich, natch). When he tells us, no-nonsense officemate Maxine (Keener) about the experience, she immediately comes up with a way to capitalize on the situation by renting out rides in the Malkovich noggin to those seeking a temporary stature boost. When he gives his wife Lotte (Diaz) a shot in the driver's seat, she realizes not only that she is a man trapped in a woman's body, but that she is desperately in love with Maxine. Maxine, for her part, is all for her gender-confused savior, but only when Lotte is looking out through Malkovich's eyes. And they say you can't get the great romance anymore.

"I started reading the script," said

Diaz, "and I was laughing out loud, it was so bizarre. I was like, 'What could possibly happen next? You can't guess.'"

Added Keener, "I didn't enjoy it as much, because I was trying to beat the plot. And I figured out that I shouldn't try to do that. I just gave in to it and said, 'What's happening here?' and just had a good time with it. After that, I was on the phone immediately as I was reading the last word, going, 'I need...to meet...the director!'"

Turns out the director—famed commercial and music-video helmer Spike Jonze, here making his feature film debut—easily recognized what he'd have in Keener, whose previous work has ranged all the way from a relaxed, undubbed comic turn in Steven Soderbergh's *OUT OF SIGHT* to a more serious role opposite Nicolas Cage in Joel Schumacher's *8MM*. Diaz, of course, was previously able to prove by her very presence why *THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY*, that beguiling persona in order to play a rather high-strung, animal-obsessed,

CAMERON DIAZ

"Are looks a crutch in Hollywood? I think that's a really stupid [question] and that's all I have to say."

spouse-cum-pet-shop-owner with a spray of frizzled hair to match.

Oh yeah, about hair: It seemed the topic was all that a few journalists seemed interested in talking about. Troopers to the last, Diaz and Keener humored their obsession. "Every movie always ends up being about hair," observed Diaz. "You don't realize it. First-time directors... It's always the funniest thing to see a first-time director deal with the hair issue. It's something they think they'll never, ever have to think about. Never in a million years do they think that they would have to know a wig or an extension or color. But it's character! And it's also what's going to be on the screen and you're going to be seeing 100% of the time, or 99% of the time." Added Keener, "My husband, who's an actor as well, I always thought he was obsessing about his hair and what he needs. What I didn't realize was because they shoot out of sequence, of course, he needs to know when to time a shave for a little bit of stubble. It's crazy, but it's necessary."

"Chris McMillan designed my look. He did an amazing job. We went through the bag, 'What am I supposed to look like? Am I forties, bag, wavy stuff?' We did a film test of that—it was ridiculous! Like a Baby Jane—sooo bad! Then, y'know, it was, 'Try something maybe a little cleaner.' But

Importance of BEING: "I choose roles carefully after *THE MASK*. When you commit to a project, that's it for 3 months of your life. You breathe the script."





Diaz confers with John Cusack & Catherine Keener on *DOING JOHN MALKOVICH* (her choice line: "Don't stand in the way of my sexualization as a man"). Sales totaled the \$13 million film as "decentred genius."

CAMERON DIAZ

"In America, the movie star is royalty. [The public] has put a claim on actors as their possession."

a lot more, actually, than is in the movie, we shot for about a week and a half. We had two amazing stunt women who did the big, split, cartoon falls. But we did a lot of our stuff. Our stunt coordinator was amazing and very trustworthy and we felt really safe. He kept saying, "Yeah, you guys can do it."

Added Diaz, "We were standing on the roof of a bus, driving around, going 35 miles an hour. We were jumping down head-first through a hole in the roof with kids in the seats, running down a ways, falling out of the bus while the bus is moving and our heads are this close to the street. It was so much fun. Every day, you go to work, and it's something you've never done before."

You get the feeling, though, that the two women wished their time before the assembled press was as much of an adventure. When one journalist asked whether looks could be a crutch in the film industry, Diaz couldn't suppress an exasperated roll of her eyes. "Looks, crutch, Hollywood...right, that question. Yeah, you know, I think that, uh... I think that's really stupid. And that's all I have to say."

Another writer—repeatedly billing himself as "the only gay reporter in the room" (a little presumptuously, perhaps... Okay, the only "out" gay writer in the room)—won a livelier response by quizzing the actresses on the budding romance between Lotte and Maxine, dubbing *MALKOVICH*'s pre-lesbian stance. "We never talked about sexuality," said Diaz. "We never even thought of it, not while we were doing it or even by the end of it. They happen to be women, but they're just two people."

Noted Keener, "We were working on character. For me...I don't know...We never really talked about it, thought about it, never had a discussion with Spike about it. It was just sort of, 'He loves you and now she loves you, so now you love

I think he perceived Maxine as having blunt, chic, straightened hair."

Said Diaz, "My wig was actually a three-quarters wig and the front was my hair. We just matched it in to make the texture work." As if realizing how far into minutiae the topic had drifted, she suddenly blurted, "Because it's all about hair and I won't go into why we did that, because it's a really long conversation." Thank you.

Better, it turned out, to get her going about her screen-time with trained chimpanzees, several of which play the part of a single pet whom Lotte keeps in her apartment. The primate, actually, became a crucial plot element when Craig, stricken with jealousy over Lotte's ability to reduce the otherwise unresponsive Maxine, locks his hound and duct-tape-gagged wife in a steel cage. It's chimp to the rescue, the creature meanwhile having his own, emotional epiphany as he frees the human. "What about the kiss through the tape?" asked Keener of the dramatic highlight of the sequence. "Wasn't that beautiful?"

Diaz seemed to favor a slightly more restrained view of her Jane Goodall moment. "My scenes with the chimps were some of the most cherished experiences of my life," she admitted. "They are unbelievable. They're us, they're just better. They're not affected by what we are. I couldn't imagine what it would be like to experience a wild chimp. These are not wild chimps, they're held for our usage. That's a little upsetting, but the freedom that these chimps were allowed

and the freedom that I was allowed to have with them was just unbelievable. I spent a lot of time with them sort of bonding and playing in the trees."

"They're still wild animals, and there's nothing you can do to stop them from their natural instincts. Working on a set with a chimp, you have to be careful with quick movements and voice level and the people around because, at any time, they could just decide to attack. And it could be unintentional, they could break your arm but they just meant to go, 'Ahhhh, you're so crazy, I love you!'"

As if love-smitten primates weren't enough of a risk, both actresses decided to press their luck by performing a number of stunts themselves, including most of the action in a climactic sequence where Lotte chases Maxine through the murky depths of Malkovich's subconscious. According to Keener, the two of them were up for the challenge. "We wanted to [do the stunts]. We really didn't have to, but we wanted to. We volunteered. We did

Will they melt into the mind of John MALKOVICH? Keener and Cusack on the 7 1/2 floor. ("Do you know what a metaphysical can of worms this portal is?")



him because she's in him.' It was that. It was never...I mean, pronouns were like..." She flung her hands up to demonstrate the jettisoning of gender distinctions. "Maybe if you think it was done well, it's because it wasn't addressed as an issue. It was addressed as, 'Who are these specific people and what are they interested in?' It's more specific of life."

"That's what I mean when I say they're just two people," Diaz continued. "Because I always consider men and women who are gay...sure it can be about the sexuality of it. But I had a friend who's gay say to me, 'I'm in love with someone, he just happens to be a man.' That kind of made sense to me—all of a sudden, it was human again. It was one of my first experiences, at a young age, of someone saying that to me and I went, 'Wow! Oh, I get it: two people being in love. I can know what that is, I can be in love.' I think with Lotte and Maxine, they're in love. They found one another because they needed what the other one had, and they completed one another. I have a deep affection for Catherine because we're friends anyway. And all my girlfriends who are friends of mine, I love them."

Concluded Keener, "We didn't have to develop that with each other. It was there."

And besides, there were more immediate issues to address. Keener, for one, needed to figure out why Maxine was one of the few people in the film who doesn't want to enter John Malkovich's brain. "I came up with reasons when I was being obayed by Lotte [through Malkovich's subconscience]. It was horrible! I think that Maxine...I don't know...Charlie [Kaufman] wrote it, but for me, I figured that Maxine just liked her own existence. Maybe she shouldn't have and I think when Lotte comes into her life, she realizes a lot more of what she is missing."

Maxine, actually, isn't alone in that particular character arc—the film is filled with people in desperate quest for the things they lack. Of course, many of them become convinced that



Delighting in *THE MARK*, ex-model Cameron Diaz (top), subsequently worked in low-budget pics (*THE LAST SUPPER*, *HEAD ABOVE WATER*). She didn't swim mainstream again until *MY BEST FRIEND'S WEDDING*. *R. Cast in **MALKOVICH***

the answer lies within the skull of a famed, and occasionally infamous, stage and screen actor—a risky proposition, Keener conceded, no matter who you are or who you want to be: "It might be interesting to experience somebody else. Seriously, because, within the parameters of the movie, it's only 15 minutes, so that's not... Well, it could be a halfish fifteen minutes, so I'd better be more selective."

Cautioned Diaz, "This movie is not truly John Malkovich, though. Obviously, the things that you see him doing are things that everybody does, which is true of all human beings. We've all had the breakfast coffee, we've all eaten the same dry toast. John Malkovich is playing a character called John Malkovich, obviously an actor."

"I think that people think it's a depiction of John Malkovich," added Keener. "But that's great, and good for John Malkovich. This movie is so about John making fun of himself, and whether you know that he's doing that or not is irrelevant. He doesn't care. I think people often covet the life of a celebrity, sometimes for good reason. Here he has this incredible apartment with beautiful artwork, and all of this."

Said Diaz, "You know, England has the Queen and the Prince. But in America, the movie star has become royalty. It's sort of [the public's] stater, their claim: 'This is our wealth.' America considers filmmaking theirs, so they put a stake and claim



on actors as their possession: 'Oh, we have the right to have all access to these people; they're ours.' I think that all the people who go into Malkovich, they claim they want to be a part of that, too."

Which wasn't to say that such awareness could be restricted solely to the public sector. In summing up her feelings for *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH*, Keener admitted how strong the pull of this bizarre, intriguing project was: "I looked at the script, and I thought, Oh my God, are they for real? Are they gonna make this movie? It's so clearly, more deeply well-written that I imagine—I don't know that this is true—that every actor who could have gotten a job in this movie really, really wanted one."

continued on page 16

Bonnie-Jill Laflin Baywatch Babe

MEET THE LAFLIN WITCH (SHE PLAYED ONE IN *MACBETH*). THE EX-DALLAS COWBOY CHEERLEADER ON *MERMAIDS* & FANTASY FILM.

By DAN SCAPPEROTTI

When you're descended from Geronimo, the Apache warrior/medicine man, it's not likely that you're one to sit on the sidelines and let the world pass you by. Endowed with a competitive spirit, Bonnie-Jill Laflin has successfully leaped from one career to another, making a transition from dancer to model to taking a plunge in the trademark *BAYWATCH* bathing togs, though her casting in the latter was not without consequences.

A native of Concord, California, the juvenile Laflin demonstrated an aptitude for dance. Her experience came in handy when she tried out for the Bay Area's Golden State Warriors cheerleading team. Laflin went on to win the NBA Cheerleader of the Year title in 1994. It's likely that her love of the great outdoors herded the young cheerleader to a different team, one unencumbered by restrictive walls. Laflin transplanted her talents to the San Francisco 49ers football team. When the roster played the Super Bowl in 1996, Laflin



"I'm really outgoing & social, but I'm not at all a party girl. I'm focused on my career; I've always loved performing. I do love casting calls almost ever day."

was there to cheer them on and was rewarded with a souvenir unique to women. "I got a Super Bowl ring with the 49ers for the 1995-96 year," she said proudly. "The 49ers is the only team in the NFL that gives rings to cheerleaders." By 1997, Laflin had decided to shift to the Lone Star State, winning a berth on perhaps the famous cheerleader squad in the country, the Dallas Cowboys. "There were 1700 girls at the audition trying out for 13 spots," Laflin explained. "That was a two-week process. It was a pretty big honor." National commercials for the team followed, furnishing Laflin with some limelight in the modeling arena. Winning the title of Miss Dallas/Fort Worth USA in 1998 further encouraged a crack as a model. Laflin's image subsequently earned substantive visibility in the print media, surfacing on newspapers, magazines, posters and calendars.

"I started doing lots of swimsuit catalogues and magazines, plenty of print work," she recounted. "When I was living in Dallas, I was working at the



"I love mermaids," says **BEWATCH**'s Berenice-JR Lefebvre. "I'm looking a 'sea' world for my website. The look will include sea horses, star fish & treasure chests."

Hooters restaurant as a waitress, it's really big in Texas and Florida, they're based out of Clearwater. I wore the little orange shorts and tight little tank tops, and you serve chicken wings and beer. They have their Hooters calendar and their Hooters magazine. They used me for all their calendars and billboards and playing cards. The calendar was one of last year's best sellers. I actually have my own trading cards, which are on my website. We posted nine different pictures that were photographed in tropical locales like Jamaica and Hawaii...and just about everywhere else!"

Working in television commercials prompted Laffin to sample the acting profession. She initially attended a casting session for *BAYWATCH*. "I auditioned for one of the producers, Greg Bonane," said Laffin. "I had to put on a red bathing suit and take a swim test. They want you to be strong enough to handle those waves. The ocean is different than being in a pool. Actually, on one of the episodes I did, I was in the water a majority of the time. It was very scary because one time I was caught in a rip tide and pulled under the water. I flipped over and a

It: "My character patrols the beach on *BAYWATCH*. It's been a very good experience working with the cast & the crew [below, I'm in the middle]."



real lifeguard had to come rescue me."

Nevertheless, after she was hired for some episodes—including "Friends Forever" and "Bally High"—Lafin moved to Los Angeles with her two cats, Dallas and Star. "I play Tina on the show," explains the starlet. "She's a new lifeguard on BAYWATCH, patrolling the beach. It was a really good experience and a lot of fun working with that crew. All the production people, the producers and directors, were really great to work with. David Hasselhoff is really great."

Her cheerleader past caught up with Lafin when *Playboy* was planning their "Girls of the NFL" spread (February, '98 issue). "They searched around for who they thought were the best girls from each team," said Lafin. "Then they would contact them and asked each to submit pictures: head shot, body shot in a swimsuit, no nudity. From there they had us come down to Playboy West, which is down here in Beverly Hills, and they'd take a nude Polaroid of you. Then they contacted who they wanted to use. They wanted to get an array of different teams, not just one team. At the time they wanted current cheerleaders, but they couldn't use current cheerleaders because it's against your contract to do any nudity while you're cheering. So a few of us were former cheerleaders. This was the first time I did nudity for modeling. *Playboy* was the only magazine I ever thought about because it's classy, and it's helped a lot of people's careers."

The pictorial opens with a nude photo of Lafin and an insert shot of the former porn pun girl clad in her SF Gold Rush uniform. The piece notes that Lafin is the only woman who qualified as a member of both the Dallas Cowboys and 49ers cheerleading squads. "It was shot at someone's home in the Hollywood Hills," she said. "Behind the house in the

BONNIE-JILL LAFLIN

"I play Tina, a lifeguard on BAYWATCH. One of episodes I did was very scary. I was caught in a riptide and pulled under the water. I flipped over & a real life lifeguard had to rescue me."



"The *Playboy* restaurant chain photographed me for their billboards and playing cards. I also posed for their calendar [it], which was one of last year's best-sellers. As their waitress, I wore the signature duddie—little orange shorts and this light blue tank top." © Lafin in *BAYWATCH*'s "Friends Forever" episode



backyard is this big waterfall in the pool. They've used it for several shots and that location has been in a lot of TV shows and movies. I haven't done anything since for them, but they want me to test as a Playmate. That's up in the air right now because a lot of people I spoke with told me that if you do a lot of *Playboy* stuff, it would be a roadblock to acting because people don't take you seriously. I don't want to be stereotyped. For modeling it can help you, but for acting it can be a roadblock—you're just cast as the sexy girl."

Lafin's *BAYWATCH* role proved a catalyst to other gigs, including guest appearances on prime time and syndicated series. But her chastisement of the "sexy girl" stereotype notwithstanding, Lafin is perpetually cast as, well... "On *NASH BRIDGES*, I played one of these sexy girls who had to deal with Don Johnson and Cheech [Marin]. I was a girl who was a witness at a murder and they question me. I played a model on *LOVE BOAT: THE NEW WAVE*. They had five sexy girls who were doing a big modeling shoot on the boat, and we start to distract the guests and the crew. The whole episode revolved around our photo shoot for this lingerie company. I was a Playmate on the *JAMIE FOXX SHOW*, it was shot at the *Playboy* mansion. Jamie's sister goes to the *Playboy* mansion and he doesn't like it, so he goes over there thinking there's going to be naked girls running around. He sees how it really is and talks to a few of us there. It was funny. They didn't even know that I'd done *Playboy* when I went to audition for that part."

Lafin jumped at the opportunity to work with Burt Reynolds in *HARD TIMES*, a movie produced for the TNT cable network. "There are three of those films," she noted. "I'm in the last one. I'm one of the girls who talks to Burt. He thinks I'm flirting with him but I'm actually interested in his dog, a big bull mastiff. He was re-

ally nice."

When I inquired about her heritage, the ingenious acknowledged that she's "a descendant of Geronimo on my mother's side. My mother is Apache. I never even knew about it until four years ago when my uncle, who has done a lot of research on our history, found out that Geronimo was a great great, great, great, great, great, great uncle of mine. It was kind of neat to hear about that."

Her brother's affection for fantasy films proved quite contagious. Laflin is a self-professed genre aficionado. "I got hooked on them," she said. "I love mermaids so I love *SPLASH*. There is a famous pinup painter, Carlos Cartagena, and he's painting me as a mermaid. He paints a lot of pinup girls and does a lot of fairies or mermaids." Laflin is also embodying a new Marvel comic book character.



She pegs *THE WIZARD OF OZ* as her favorite movie of all time; hence, her role in a San Francisco theatre adaptation of the L. Frank Baum classic proved particularly appealing. "The productions at that theatre are basically all musicals so there is a lot of dancing. I auditioned for *The Wizard of*

BONNIE-JILL LAFLIN

44] got hooked on fantasy films. My favorite is *THE WIZARD OF OZ* and I love *SPLASH*. Carlos Cartagena is painting me as a mermaid. I loved playing Maccavity in a production of *Cats*."



↑ Laflin, photographed by Zac Stransky, is crowning Miss Dallas/Fort Worth (30). "After that, I started doing lots of print work." Ⓢ "As a cheerleader for the San Francisco 49ers, I got a Super Bowl ring for the 1995-'96 year." L: "Me as a Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader. There were 1780 girls auditioning for 13 spots."



Oz and got one of the lead roles, the Cowardly Lion. There was a lot of dancing, a lot of ballet. It was fun. I had on the big suit and the gold mane. It was really cool. This theatre usually tries to showcase up-and-coming talent rather than star performers."

The same company produced Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with Laflin cast "as the second witch. They were really intense with the makeup. It didn't even look like me." Her favorite role, however, was in the Contra Costa Ballet production of *Cats*: "I played Maccavity. I've always loved performing. I wanted to take it more seriously, that's why I made the move to L.A. I started dancing at the age of two, progressing to shows when I was five and in ballet companies. I started dancing professionally when I was 16. That was my big love, but then you kind of start to get into the modeling and acting. It worked out great."

American rodeo has been fertile ground for Laflin, who grew up around arenas and participated in barrel racing events (her beloved mare died last year). In 1988, she was voted Miss Rodeo Dallas. "My parents actually own race horses," she said. "I was involved with horses since I was a child. I used to compete with my horse. There's a company called Cowboy Up, a western apparel company which does the whole line—everything from jeans to shirts and everything you can imagine. Rodeo Cold is a new beer that Cowboy Up just came out with, which is supposed to be made for the real cowboys. Ten percent of the proceeds goes to the rodeo foundation, which is for cowboys who have retired and have no other means of support. The beer was just launched recently and will be distributed throughout the rodeo circuit. I've been christened Miss Rodeo Cold."

Looking back on her days in the barrel racing competition, Laflin recalled, "It's a

clover leaf track. You have to go to the right and then to the left, and then straight down the middle of the arena and back down. It's actually really hard and you have to have a good horse that can turn on a dime. It's intense and a lot of fun. I won a lot when I was younger but, as my dancing career took over, I didn't spend as much time at it and pursued it less and less."

Not to be outdone by other cyberchicks, Laffin recently launched her own website (page 62). "People told me it was a good way to get exposure, and for me to get my name out there," she said. "I started doing it in October of 1998. And I'm constantly changing it. I'm tailoring a sea motif for the site. There will be these treasure chests and sea horses and star fish. I'm selling posters and trading cards and photos. The member section will be where I sell more exclusive pictures. It includes see-thru and some topless pictures—but not complete nudity. They're just a little more overtly sexy. There's also going to be sound and music. We'll play with the technology."

Her hectic schedule recently included posing for Nike and four national commercials, including spots for Sony Play Station, Honda (their new Prelude) and Doritos. Laffin loves to spend leisure time with her pets and "savors" frequent visits to her family in San Francisco. "I'm really outgoing and social," she said, "but I'm not at all a party girl. I'm focused on my career. I have casting calls almost everyday." And she has to keep moving; perhaps it's in the blood. After all, Geronimo had to keep one jump ahead of the U.S. Cavalry—which he did successfully for over ten years. □

"I'm a descendant of Geronimo. My mom is Apache. I never knew about it until 4 years ago, when my uncle researched and found out Geronimo was a great...great uncle of mine."



The Life and Films of Mary Millington

AS BRITAIN'S HORROR FILM INDUSTRY DWINDLED, SOFTCORE SEX BOOMED: A STAR WAS BORN IN 1977. SHE DIED TWO YEARS LATER.

BY ALAN JONES

Mention the name of Mary Millington to British blue-collar men of a certain age, and their eyes will light up with affectionate recognition tinged with innate sadness. Mary was the girl-next-door who shot to notoriety/centerfold fame in the '70s, thanks to her liberal attitude about sex and her self-commercialisation. Her career pendulously traversed from glamour model/cover girl to hardcore porn luminary to star of a softcore series that minted gold at the time was boxoffice. It's a story that also says a lot about the entire disco era, Britain's sexually repressive society (hardcore porn is still prohibited though there are now signs that restrictions may be eased) and the desperate straits the British Film Industry found itself in when the Hammer horror boom subsided.

Mary's career was meteoric, controversial and scandalous. Her life was ultimately doomed after a downward spiral of celebrity sex, high-class prostitution, police harassment, tax problems and cocaine abuse. She committed suicide at the age of 33. In a display of public emotion, sex shops in London's red light Soho district closed their doors on the day of her funeral. Her legacy has also lived on in a number of startling revelations, like how she counted Prime Minister Harold Wilson and blonde bombshell Diana Dors as lovers. And one of her movies, 1977's COME PLAY WITH ME, still maintains the record for the longest theatrical run in British cinema history.

Finally, Mary's unique career has



Millington as one of THE PLAYERS. "It's the only film she made that Americans have widely seen. It proved a popular cable attraction & is still shown."

been chronicled in its proper perspective. Simon Sheridan's *Come Play With Me: The Life and Films of Mary Millington* (FAB Press, £14.99) is a loving, touching and eye-opening tribute to Britain's only true blue sex superstar and sexual freedom icon. As Mary herself said in 1977, "Sex is something to be enjoyed, something to be savored, something to cling to, something to be indulged in whenever possible. The old slogan 'Make Love, Not War' was a very good one."

"I was born to write the book," says 28-year-old author Sheridan, without a trace of arrogance or irony. "I can't explain it but I was eight years old when she died in 1979, and the newspaper reports about her suicide affected me in such a profound way. Don't ask me why I have a connection with this woman, or why she entered my psyche: all I know is I love her for the way she lived her life—without any embarrassment or apology—and how she achieved so much based on her winning personality. Yes, she was beautiful even though she didn't think so. She always complained about her breasts being too small. Yet that was the key to her success: her no-nonsense approach, and remarks about her own limited assets, made her accessible to every man. If you stopped her in the street, she'd give you a kiss. And what other movie star could be appearing on the big screen in the West End while working in a south London sex shop? If you popped in to see her, she was always welcoming and attentive. Her fans loved her for being there for them."

A more mature Sheridan nurtured his intrigue with Mary by screening all of her movies and collecting film memorabilia related to the sexpot's career. Many of the photos reproduced in *Come Play With Me* originate from his exhaustive collection. In 1996, he read that the Channel Four television network was assembling a Mary Millington documentary titled SEX AND FAME. "I rang up the production company, told them of my interest in Mary, and they hired me to research the program," recounts Sheridan. "I liked the end result, but it was clear that a one

MARY MILLINGTON joins the Blue Squad
and blows her cover!

DAVID SULLIVAN'S

THE **PLAYBIRDS** X

A Murder Thriller with Thrilling Bodies!

With **MARY HALLWORTH** - ALAN LAKE - GUYNN EDWARDS
DERREN BENTLEY - SUZIE MANUEL - PENNY SPENCER - KERRY LYNN - SANDRA JORNE
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 SPECIAL GUEST APPEARANCE BY **WINDSOR DAVIES**
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 A NOVELTY PRODUCTION - LONDON - 1994

T. "PLAYSTIDS is my favorite exploitation film that I've made," notes biographer Simon Sheridan. "She plays a policewoman, hilarious in light of her being such a resident porn connoisseur." In *Millhouse*, he had a lesbian liaison with *DAVID GALAXY* co-star, Biana Cane.

hour documentary could hardly do Mary full justice. That's when I decided to write a book about her. It was labor of love because I quit my job and lived off my savings for two years while I researched Mary. I'd obviously come into contact with a lot of people via the program, but I mostly tended to just turn up on people's doorsteps and start asking questions. Her family made me feel very welcome and rallied round. I have no idea why because I know that, ten years previously, someone else had tried to write a book and got absolutely nowhere.

"I told everyone right from the start that I would tell Mary's story, warts and all, as I saw it. Some of them didn't know about her cocaine problem. Others didn't know how much she loved animals. Many knew nothing about her bisexuality. But her family and friends were totally up-front about how much they loved her, and weren't

MARY MALLINGTON
"meets"
SUPER STUD

**ROSEMARY
ENGLAND**

in a
sensationally
funny film
for
both sexes

ALVIN LANE
GUTHRIE SCHWARTZ
WALTER WILLIAMSON
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Confessions from

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embarrassed to talk about any aspect of her life. They were delighted with the finished book and paid me the biggest compliment. They said, 'If Mary were alive today, she would have been really proud of it.' Reviews don't matter now. Their approval is all I cared about."

Mary Millington was born out of wedlock on November 30, 1946. Her mother, Ivy Joan Quiller, was devoted to her offspring from the start and brought up Mary in the Surrey countryside where her bubbly, caring personality blossomed alongside her burgeoning sexuality. Completely at ease with her body and nudity—and candidly confident in all sexual matters—Mary married butcher Bob Maxted in 1964. They remained married right up until Mary's death. Bob would remain her strongest supporter—never mind his spouse's affairs, the hardcore career she fell into by accident and non-stop police aggravation. "People who have

MARY MILLINGTON

"Sex is something to be enjoyed, something to be savored, something to cling to & be indulged in."

read the book always ask the same question first: "Why did Bob put up with everything?" Well, he was devoted to her and they were inseparable. He knew quite well what she was doing but he wanted her to be happy. He tolerated everything out of pure, unconditional love. I think their sexual relationship waned as her career took off, and they became more like brother and sister. But sex and love are two entirely different things, and he let her do whatever she wanted as long as she enjoyed it. He was often the motivating force behind many of her decisions."

Mary's modeling career was launched while she was managing a boutique in Dorking. She was spotted by John Lindsay, a pioneering British porn photographer, and asked to pose for some topless shots. Within weeks, Mary was unashamedly posing with her legs spread apart and glamour magazines were snapping them up by the bucket load. Starring in blue movies, she earned extra revenue to pay for her sick mother's medical bills. *MISS BOREHOLE* (1970), *ORAL CONNECTION* (1971), *RESPONSE* (1974) and *PRIVATE PLEASURES* (1975) were typical titles from the clutter of hardcore movies she anonymously starred in.

Then came the man who would have the most profound effect on Mary's future: thanks to his magazine and newspaper empire, David Sullivan was—and still is—the self-styled King of British Porn. Throughout the '70s, he constantly flouted the highly restrictive Obscene Publications Act to build himself a big business operation fueled on sexual merchandise. In 1973, Sullivan launched the magazine *Private*, edited by Doreen Millington, which became the first British porn publication accessible to the mass market. Sullivan's Whitehouse—its title is wicked "homage" to British anti-porn campaigner Mary Whitehouse—subsequently pushed the limits of whatever was gaged as civilized in the "erect nipple/spread-eagled legs" phylum. But what Sullivan wanted was a recognizable spokesperson to promote the publication. Upon meeting Mary at his 20th birthday party, he



"Mary's remarks about her limited assets made her accessible. If you stopped her in the street, she'd give you a kiss. What other star would be appearing on the big screen while working in a London sex shop?"

engaged the fledgling model as his mascot. Pretending that she was Doreen Millington's little sister—and changing her surname to fit the charade—Mary Millington became the mascot of Sullivan's entire industry. The couple also embarked on a torrid affair that Sullivan recalls in Sheridan's book...

"Back in the '70s, Sullivan was a tough customer," says Sheridan. "He's a different man today and far calmer. He told me I could ask him any ques-

tions about Mary and I could write what I liked about him. There's no question they loved each other. Sure, he saw her as a way of marketing his magazines. But if it began as a business venture, it certainly became a lot more as he featured more spreads of Mary while producing more magazines to cope with the demand for them. Mary was well aware she was being exploited by Sullivan. But she was exploiting herself, too, for rich rewards as money was vitally important to her



David Sullivan transformed Mary Masted into Britain's premiere porn icon. She debuted in print as Millington, in Sullivan's *Playbirds* (magazine). Her photographic image was later legged to a myriad of sex commerce outlets, including audio masturbation cassettes & massage parlor memberships.

because it meant freedom. She didn't have a problem with anything she did. She made the best of what life offered her. That's a great way to live."

Sullivan, in fact, franchised Mary into the most famous brand name in the British sex business. Premiering in November '75, *Playbirds* magazine was an up-market glossy publication: Mary's visibility expanded to a photo on practically every page, in addition to numerous articles that were supposedly written by the bombshell. The most popular of the latter was her sexual travelogue, *Mary Goes U.K.* she visited virtually every city in Britain in an attempt to have an orgasm. The photo layouts accompanying the series found Mary stripping off with wild abandon in the most ordinary of locales. Magazine sales were huge. As a result of her public idolatry, Mary's seductive image pitched sex aids, masturbatory audio cassettes, saunas and massage parlor memberships, and hardcore photos. Between them, Mary and Sullivan had sewn-up England's sex commerce and the only way to further maximize their potential was in the movies.

But while America was enjoying a hardcore movie revolution in the wake of *DEEP THROAT* (1972) and *BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR* (1972), Britain's sex film industry was still firmly rooted in a '50s sensibility of poor production values, lame acting, double entendres and coy playfulness. And no sex! Each title that turned a profit in Britain, circa the 1970s, was virtually nothing more than a *CARRY ON*-style farce replete with aging comedians, dysfunctional characters (bumbling handymen, impotent husbands, insoucious priests) and some cheesecake served-up via a cadre of topless models. *SECRETS OF A DOOR TO DOOR SALESMAN* (1973), *THE AMOROUS MILEMAN* (1974), *CONFESSIONS OF A WINDOW CLEANER* (1974), *I'M NOT FEELING MYSELF TONIGHT* (1975) and *CAN YOU KEEP IT UP FOR A WEEK?* (1974) are typical of the era, the titles promised titillation but the goods were rarely delivered. Yet the money such limp exploitation movies were making was enough for hangers-on, within the film business, to jump from Britain's

once remunerative horror industry to a cheaper bandwagon.

It didn't take long for David Sullivan to see the profit margins in British sex films, and a chance encounter prompted him to enter the fray. One of the photographers he had hired for magazine spreads was down-on-his-luck George Harrison Marks, the veteran British porn trailblazer who made a splash in 1961 with *NAKED AS NATURE INTENDED*, which starred his girlfriend and #1 pin-up, Pamela Green. Marks developed an unproduced script called *COME PLAY WITH ME*, which was turned into a star vehicle for Mary Millington. In truth, Mary had already made cameo appearances—billed as Mary Maxied—in the bawdy *ESKIMO NELL* (1974) and *EROTIC INFERNO* (1975): but this didn't stop Sullivan from relentlessly promoting the £120,000 production as his star's debut in "the hottest film ever released on Britain's shores."

Dire in the extreme, *COME PLAY WITH ME* starred Marks and sitcom vet Alfie Bass as two bank counterfeiter-hiding in a Scottish health farm

operated by comedienne Irene Handl, who employs ex-strippers as nurses. Despite dreadful reviews, the movie astounded everyone by turning into a hit of astronomical proportions: as an example, the Millington "comedy" was held over in one West End cinema for 201 continuous weeks. "Mary was only in the movie for twelve minutes," says Sheridan, "yet that was enough for her fans who wanted to see her in the flesh for the first time. The film couldn't fail in a way because Sullivan constantly promoted it through his magazines as the sexiest film ever. He did get a few letters of complaint but he told me he threw them straight in the garbage."

Handy with the success of *COME PLAY WITH ME*, Sullivan mined the same formula in 1978's *THE PLAYBIRDS* (promoted with the tag line, "A murder-thriller with thrilling sods"), 1979's *CONFESSIONS FROM THE DAVID GALAXY AFFAIR* (retitled *STAR SEX* after it failed at the box-office) and *QUEEN OF THE BLUES*. "THE PLAYBIRDS is my favorite exploitation movie that Mary made," remarks Sheridan. "I love it because she plays a policewoman, hilarious in the light of her being such an ardent porn campaigner, and she's featured all the way through the action. It's also notable because it's the only movie she made that Americans have widely seen. It proved a popular cable attraction and is still being shown. The best movie Mary ever made is *THE GREAT ROCK 'N' ROLL SWINDLE* although she's only in it for a few minutes. In this punk documentary about the Sex Pistols group, she has sex with guitarist Steve Jones in a Soho cinema. It's a fantastic film about the era and Mary is great in it. Her small role in that movie means she will forever be a part of cinema history—aside from the trashy other movies she made away from Sullivan at the time like *WHAT'S UP SUPERDOC?* (1978)."

Mary's role in *THE PLAYBIRDS* proved a catalyst to one of the more startling episodes in her sex life. Starring with her in the virtually plotless whodunit was Alan Lake, the alcoholic husband of one-time British sex goddess Diana Dors. Mary had first met Dors when they appeared together in *KEEP IT UP DOWNSTAIRS* (1976), a pathetic "erotica" spoof of the then popular TV series, *UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS*. By the time Mary was co-starring with Lake, her fame had overshadowed that of the faded '50s femme fatale and Dors was convinced they were having an affair. Nothing could have been further from the truth and the fracas eventually developed into a friendly relationship. Mary's admis-

SIMON SHERIDAN

"Mary's sudden death left everyone in shock. Her suicide note blamed the police for her actions."



"I love Mary for the way she lived her life, without embarrassment," says biographer Simon Sheridan. "I wanted to tell her story, write it all, as I saw it."

sions of bisexuality led to a one-night lesbian liaison with Dors. Sheridan points out, "It would be a mistake to call Diana Dors a closet lesbian, or even a bisexual, but sex with women enraptured and intrigued her. Mary recalled their one night stand as being 'disastrous' because she was so clumsy and domineering. But they did make a connection because Mary really looked up to Dors. However, Dors was hypocritically two-faced over her attitudes towards porn and sex, and she used Mary in many respects to get back into the limelight. I used to quite like Diana Dors until I researched the book. The more stories I heard, the more I thought she was a dreadful woman. Their odd friendship is the thing that surprised me most about Mary's life."

With all of her films dominating the

West End, Mary—still flaunted in Sullivan's magazines as the publisher's #1 draw—was prepping for another film slated for production, *FUNERAL IN SOHO*. Then, suddenly, the unthinkable happened. The constant raids on her sex shop by corrupt police, threats of imprisonment, bouts of kleptomania, her cocaine habit, an enormous bill for back taxes and a continuous merry-go-round of sex with celebrities (who paid up to £200 for the pleasure of sleeping with Britain's top glamour queen) all took their psychological toll. Mary committed suicide in the early hours of August 19, 1979.

"Her sudden death left everyone in a state of shock," laments Sheridan. "Her suicide note was extraordinary in that it blamed the police authorities for her actions, while outlining her hope that porn would be legal in Britain one day. Sullivan didn't turn up for her funeral because he was so distressed by the utter waste of her star potential. Mary knew her pimp days were limited but I do believe she would have crossed over into more mainstream entertainment, like possibly starring in a soap opera or something like that. Who knows how far she could have gone considering what she had already achieved?"

The tragedy didn't prevent a grieving Sullivan from exploiting his late cash cow. *MARY MILLINGTON'S TRUE BLUE CONFESSIONS* (1980) was a crass tribute that supposedly documented her life but was really an excuse to recycle old film clips. Sullivan misjudged his readers and audiences for the first time in his profession, the pseudo-documentary emerged as the most hated and despised film of his career. Charges of vulgar tastelessness were also levelled at *MARY MILLINGTON'S WORLD STRIPTEASE EXTRAVAGANZA* (1981), a tacky burlesque revue that only featured Mary in the title. "Wall the name Mary Millington he remembered in forty years time?" queries Sheridan. "I'd like to think so. Twenty years after her death, an American porn actress has taken the same name and there are numerous websites on the internet devoted to her life and films."

"Mary was more than just a footnote in British sex film history, she was the British sex film industry. Her only crime was being a beautiful woman who loved sex and adored working in the sex business. Everyone loves sex, so why do so many people have hang-ups about it? The fact that she fought so relentlessly against hypocrisy in all its forms is the reason why her story is as important one and it's why I'm so proud I could tell it."



LORIDAWN MESSURI

continued from page 4

one of my own. Well, I put it into my head that someday somebody would actually give me my own horse, and you know what? Not only was I given one horse, but I was actually given three of them!

"Even with that kind of positive thinking, there were still hurdles to overcome. On my very first film, *MALIBU NIGHTS*—directed by Serge Rodnarsky—I had to do several nude scenes. Now when I was being raised in Idaho, I

Loridawn Messuri: "I love working with phony Jon Davis. We scurried into a train museum, I stripped, he snapped shots." *B.* "My ideal role is Lady Godiva."



did bikini contests to generate a business. I was never naked. However, in *MALIBU NIGHTS*, I felt not only nude but vulnerable...and I felt like my intimate space was intruded upon. I subsequently accclimated myself to nudity after performing other love scenes in other movies, but it's never easy to do. I did a lot of nudity in *WASTELAND JUSTICE*, but I'm entirely comfortable with Mike Trisano. I trust him completely."

Industry insiders are buzzing about Messuri's performance in *CRUISING PURGATORY*, which some have speculated may be the sleeper of 2000. "It's a very, very dark comedy," explained the actress. "Actually, it's akin to being a disturbing supernatural thriller. Lots of angst and ambiguity about bounties. Not unlike Trisano, the film's director—Dean St. John—has an easygoing, sympathetic manner. I've turned down roles because I wouldn't compromise on content. This role was irremediable. I translated my abused character, who's a stripper, into someone living on the fringe of her demonic rage. There's some nudity in my shower scene, but it's poignant and natural and not at all exploitive. My striptease scenes didn't lean on nudity but they're extremely sensual—wonderful!"

Messuri's post-*PURGATORY* demand has circumvented the bad old days of cattle calls: "Happily, there are more directors like Mike Trisano. Peter Dinklage, who just directed me in *SUN-SPLAT*, is marvelous. Whether I've relaxed more since *MALIBU NIGHTS*, or whether I'm just on a career roll here, I'm not sure. But I have been doing an awful lot of work lately. I'm doing episodes of *PARITY OF FIVE*, and I'm auditioning for a pilot. I tend to think that—as musician Yanni puts it—everything starts with an idea. If I never had the idea in my head that I would someday be an actress, I never—and I mean never—would have reached this point."

CRUISING PURGATORY is the flip side of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT*: everything is in your face, even when you prefer not to watch. The film will be covered in a forthcoming issue. □

BLAIR WITCH
HEATHER
DONAHUE

generates the same machine and it's merely the one pepping out at the other end. The people who make the product are the people who are controlled by the people who sell the product. Whether you're talking about a Nike factory or a production company, the same principle applies. It's capitalism all around. This project is my investment. In many businesses, people get a bonus for a job well done. People see me and say, 'Hey, you improvised this movie and you shot this movie. What the hell are you doing in that old car?'

Naturally, the film's unprecedented success is kindling rumors of a sequel or prequel. Is Heather Donahue likely to be involved? "I think recycling is good for aluminum," she slyly smiles as Duff pores another flash. ☐

BLAIR WITCH
SAN DIEGO

movie if that's what you want to do. Better than being tied to a desk.

"I'd love to work with directors Alexander Payne, who did *ELECTION*, and Wim Wenders. Actresses whom I admire include Cate Blanchett, Kate Winslet and Susan Sarandon, people who do it their own way. Like Jodie Foster."

Finally, what is Donahue's interpretation of the Bizar Witch? And isn't the witch—in this case, a female predator and an embodiment of evil—lapsing into misogyny? "It's just a creepy life force that decided not to move out of Burkittsville," grinned Donahue. "And how do you know the witch is a woman?"

BEING JOHN
MALKOVICH

"When [Cameron and I] got cast, we would call each other every time there was a new discovery. We'd have another revelation. 'Oh, and this...!'"

"And we're still calling each other," added Diaz. "After completion, we're still calling each other and going. Did you see that? Did you get that? It's incredible. It's like what they were saying: There's only 14 original scripts in Hollywood, and this is the 15th." □

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LETTERS

DOH...

You're really serious, right? *FF* readers actually "gauge" the sex appeal of actresses via their preferred episode of *THE SIMPSONS*? Okay, I'll play along. I've been quite enamored with producer/actress Kim Dawson (thanks for her photo in 8.7, page 6 and the notes on her sci-fi songs, *SHADOW WARRIOR*). So which episode does the comedy Kim regard as classic *SIMPSONS*? And which is the preferred episode of Snopdragon singer Sara Barrett (8.6, page 7—somebody lost me down)?

Mark Pula
Atlanta, GA

[My #1 favorite *SIMPSONS* episode is Duffless (3/18/93).] I replace Dawson. For more info on *SHADOW WARRIOR*, which is now stuck with a more generic title, *LETHAL TARGET*, tap into www.simpsonson.com. Sara Barrett pegs "Trash of the Titans" as the best of *THE SIMPSONS*. Steve Martin & Oz were guest voices on this 200th episode of the series.]

Issue 8-8 was just a sumptuous feast for the mind and eyes: terrific interviews with Charlize Theron (loved her instance performance in *THE ASTRONAUT'S WIFE*, an otherwise limp remake of *THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT*), Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicole D'Onofrio, Heather Graham as well as *BUFFY* stunt woman Sophia Crawford (awesome Denise Duff photography—hot, hot, hot) and *BUFFY* head writer Marti Noxon (thanks, Marti, for not catering teen junk food to *la AMERICAN PIE*). But I'm especially infatuated with '90s icon Mame Van Doren, who's still smokin' and outspoken in cyberspace. Sticking to *FF* policy, which is Mame's #1 episode of *THE SIMPSONS*? And what's abiding up for this drive-in diva in 2000?

John Turner
Boon Raton, Florida

[I'm Sorry, I don't watch *THE SIMPSONS*,] neither Ms. Van Doren. The year 2000 will see the release of *THE VEGAS CONNECTION*, produced by Suzanne DeLaurentis. I co-

star in the movie with Robert Carradine and Ed McMahon. It's a feature film that we hope will be spun-off into a TV series. I also posed for pictures lit and photographed by Julie Strain. I displayed my bosoms, quite frequently, for this shoot. Julie was impressed that my breasts are 100% real and she thought that my nipples were just absolutely outrageous!]

Okay, I'm a huge fan of *THE SIMPSONS* but let's set the record straight. "DOH"—Homer Simpson's exclamation of indignation—did not originate with Matt Groening's TV series. "DOH" was the trademark lamentation of Laurel and Hardy's nemesis, Jimmy Finlayson (bald, mustachioed, one eye perpetually closed into a squint). Jimmy was DOAHing since the early thirties!

Well, now I can sleep better.

Jillian McWhirter
Los Angeles, CA

WOMEN OF THE YEAR

I loved the cover story on Asia Argento (7.13), and—you're right on the money—as a director, she could "draw the Fantasy Cinema into a post-Gen X renaissance." I love her as an actress in her father's *PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*, she truly reformed the once vulnerable Christine into a *ferveur faiste*. But, behind the camera, Asia could apply her rebelliousness and rearrange women's roles in the horror & sci-fi genres (the best of '99 was Kathryn Erbe's gritty, unpretentious femme in *STIR OF ECHOES*). Please keep us abreast on Asia's odyssey: she's truly a woman for 2000.

Wendy Gossie
West Point, PA

[Later this year, we'll be printing Alan Jones' behind-the-scenes chronicle of *SCARLET DIVA*: Ms. Argento, cast in the title role, also makes her debut as a director and screenwriter. She posed exclusively for a *FF* spread that our reader predicted may "handle a heat wave."]



Readers disapprove Snopdragon singer & *FF* covergirl (8.12) Sara Barrett, who's equally outspoken about sex appeal & *THE SIMPSONS*.

Woman of the New Year? Look no further than cover lady Denise Duff (8.2): actress/photographer/women's ally.

James Stephens
New York, NY

We've seen the future and her name is Christina Fulton (8.6). Working *LUCINDA'S SPELL*, she's a breath of fresh air in a sometimes female-unfriendly genre.

Betty Franklin & Bob Pan
Owings Mills, MD

FAN CLUBS

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